

Prayer and Character Building as Core Predictors of Spiritual Growth: Lessons from Christian Higher Education for Global Well-being

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Abstract:

The world today faces multiple crises—ecological, social, and moral—that call for the emergence of a generation with a strong spiritual foundation, resilience, and clarity of values in every aspect of leadership. This study explored six dimensions of spiritual growth—Abide in Christ, Live by God's Word, Pray in Faith, Fellowship with Believers, Witness to the World, and Minister to Others—within the context of Christian higher education. Data were collected from 132 students at Universitas Advent Indonesia using the Spiritual Growth Assessment Process (LifeWay Christian Resources). Descriptive analysis revealed that "Pray in Faith" ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.59$) and "Abide in Christ" ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.61$) were the strongest practices, whereas "Minister to Others" ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.94$) indicated lower engagement. Correlation analysis revealed strong associations among the dimensions, with the highest between Witness to the World and Minister to Others ($r = 0.881$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression demonstrated that Minister to Others ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), Pray in Faith ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.01$), and Live by God's Word ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.03$) significantly predicted Fellowship with Believers. The model accounted for 62% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that prayer and moral formation are pivotal to spiritual growth, emphasizing the transformative role of Christian higher education in shaping graduates who unite intellectual competence with moral integrity and spiritual maturity.

Keywords: Christian higher education; global well-being; moral character; prayer; Spiritual growth.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is characterised by complex worldwide issues such as ecological crises, social injustices, moral failings and cultural fragmentation. In addition to technical expertise, addressing such problems requires internal resources based on values and spirituality (Fauziah, 2024). According to academics, a high spiritual quotient (SQ) is one of the keys to both individual and group success, as it enables people to use spiritual principles to make moral decisions, develop resilience and contribute to sustainable solutions (Thakadipuram, 2024). Recent meta-analytical evidence confirms that spiritual intelligence (SQ) significantly correlates with academic achievement. This shows that SQ functions as an independent predictor alongside emotional intelligence in higher education (Zhou et al., 2024).

The spiritual quotient is linked to personal success and the development of values that promote global welfare. It encompasses qualities such as compassion, humility, integrity and transcendence, which are essential for addressing

global issues that require collaboration and moral responsibility (Fauziah, 2024). For instance, the application of SQ values in higher education has been shown to enhance student motivation and identity formation, positioning spirituality as a driver of civic engagement and service orientation (Shephard & Egan, 2018). Thus, cultivating SQ in academic environments contributes to preparing students for leadership roles that require not only competence but also moral clarity and spiritual maturity.

In the broader context of spiritual development, moral character and prayer practice are two particularly important features. Moral integrity is a visible manifestation of inner spirituality, turning belief into ethical behaviour and testimony. According to research, religious character education helps pupils to develop a strong moral character, turning them into responsible and trustworthy leaders (Fajri & Kamilah, 2025). Prayer, on the other hand, is consistently connected with emotional regulation, resilience, and purpose-driven living, all of which enable people to respond ethically and meaningfully to life's obstacles (Pertwi & Ali, 2025). Prayer and moral formation work together to reflect spiritual development while also actively predicting how spirituality is lived out and transmitted in society.

Christian higher education offers a distinctive context in which to explore these dynamics, as it intentionally integrates faith, learning, and service. Universities that incorporate practices such as Bible study, sharing personal experiences, community service, prayer and moral accountability foster holistic environments that nurture intellectual and spiritual growth. Evidence suggests that such environments can significantly strengthen students' ethical awareness and prosocial commitments (Fajri & Kamilah, 2025). Understanding which aspects of spirituality most strongly predict visible outcomes—particularly testimony and service—offers practical insight for educational institutions seeking to prepare graduates who will not only excel professionally but also contribute to global well-being through moral and spiritual leadership.

Accordingly, this study employs the Spiritual Growth Assessment Process (LifeWay Christian Resources) to investigate the predictors of spiritual growth among Christian university students. The study examines the relative roles of moral formation, prayer practice, and other spiritual dimensions in shaping testimony of faith. By identifying morality and prayer as potential core predictors, this research contributes to the empirical literature on spiritual development and offers actionable insights for Christian higher education in equipping students with the capacities needed for global transformation (Fauziah, 2024).

Spiritual Quotient (SQ) has been increasingly recognized as an essential factor in holistic development, complementing cognitive and emotional intelligence. Research indicates that SQ helps individuals discover meaning and purpose, which in turn impacts their resilience, achievement, and ability to contribute to global well-being. A recent meta-analysis confirmed that SQ significantly predicts student achievement, suggesting its role as a core determinant of success in education and life (Zhou et al., 2024). Studies in higher education have also demonstrated that embedding SQ values fosters motivation and resilience, equipping students to face complex global challenges with both intellectual skill and moral strength (Hayati et al., 2024).

Prayer, as one of the primary expressions of spirituality, plays a crucial role in fostering resilience and leadership development. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that students with higher SQ, often nurtured through prayer and spiritual practices, were more resilient and capable of managing academic stress effectively (Siahaan & Wibowo, 2022). Moreover, prayer fosters humility, discernment, and emotional balance, qualities that are central to ethical and effective leadership (Azevedo et al., 2024). Within Christian education, prayer is not only a personal discipline but also a collective practice that shapes community values and cultivates leaders with compassion and justice (Nandram et al., 2025).

Moral character provides the ethical foundation for credibility and trust in both personal and professional spheres. Contemporary studies affirm that moral reasoning and integrity are indispensable predictors of ethical decision-making in academic and organizational contexts (Ratu et al., 2024). Christian higher education reinforces moral character by integrating faith and learning, ensuring that intellectual growth is accompanied by moral responsibility. When grounded in spiritual values, character education produces individuals capable of ethical leadership and meaningful contribution to society (Regina Boiliu & Author, 2025).

Christian higher education uniquely integrates spiritual development with academic excellence, nurturing students in holistic ways that prepare them for lifelong service. Evidence suggests that programs designed to integrate spiritual formation into the academic environment can enhance motivation, purpose, and identity among students (McAllister, 2022). As Ellen G. White (1903) wrote, "True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being... and with a preparation for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (E. G. White, 1903). This vision resonates with current findings that Christian higher education contributes not only to spiritual growth but also to global well-being through the formation of morally grounded and spiritually mature graduates.

METHOD

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the predictors of spiritual growth among Christian university students. Data were collected using the Spiritual Growth Assessment Process (SGAP) developed by LifeWay Christian Resources, an instrument that measures six key dimensions of spiritual development: abiding in Christ, living by God's Word, praying in faith, fellowshiping with believers, witnessing to the world, and ministering to others.

Together, these dimensions offer a comprehensive assessment of personal and communal spirituality within a higher education context. Following formal institutional approval, the survey was administered electronically via Google Forms from April to August 2025, with voluntary participation and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. A total of 140 responses were received, of which 132 complete submissions were included in the final analysis, representing students from various faculties and academic levels at Universitas Advent Indonesia. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to determine the level of each spiritual dimension, correlation analysis to assess interrelationships among the constructs, and multiple linear regression to identify significant predictors of fellowship with believers—the primary dependent variable—using a significance threshold of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 132 students from Level 1 to Level 4 across all faculties participated in this study. Their characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table. 1 Characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Category	%
Academic Level	Level 1	70 (53.0%)
	Level 2	28 (21.2%)
	Level 3	25 (18.9%)
	Level 4	9 (6.8%)
Religion	Seventh-day Adventist	115 (87.1%)
	Catholic	2 (1.5%)
	Protestant	15 (11.4%)
Faculty	Nursing	58 (43.9%)
	Economics	27 (20.5%)
	Information Technology	19 (14.4%)
	Philosophy	12 (9.1%)
	Education and Teacher Training	11 (8.3%)
	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	5 (3.8%)
	Others	18 (13.6%)
Ethnicity	Batak	69 (52.3%)
	East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)	17 (12.9%)
	Papua	10 (7.6%)
	Minahasa	7 (5.3%)
	Sundanese	6 (4.5%)
	Javanese	5 (3.8%)
	Others	18 (13.6%)

Source: Authors' analysis of primary data (2025).

The demographic profile of respondents in this study provides an essential foundation for interpreting the broader findings on prayer, character formation, and spiritual growth among students in a Christian higher education context. With a total of 132 participants from Levels 1 to 4 across various faculties, the characteristics outlined in Table 1 reveal not only numerical distributions but also the sociocultural and institutional dynamics that shape students' spiritual experiences. As Creswell emphasizes, understanding who the respondents are allows researchers to contextualize the results within the lived realities of participants, thereby enhancing interpretive depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, the demographic data are not merely descriptive; they are integral to understanding how spiritual development manifests within the population under study.

From the perspective of academic level, the data show that the majority of respondents are first-year students (Level 1), comprising 53.0 percent of the sample. This high proportion of freshmen suggests that the findings may heavily reflect the experiences of individuals who are in a critical transitional stage of their educational journey. According to Astin, the first year of university life is typically a phase characterized by identity exploration, adaptation to institutional culture, and intensive value negotiation—all of which are formative for spiritual development (Shapiro et al., 2011). Students in this stage often exhibit high receptivity to religious activities, moral instruction, and community engagement, forming a fertile ground for character-building interventions. The distribution steadily declines as academic levels advance, with Level 2 comprising 21.2 percent, Level 3 accounting for 18.9 percent, and Level 4 making up just 6.8 percent. This pattern is consistent with Tinto's observation that senior students—who are often preoccupied with academic completion, internships, and career preparation—tend to participate less frequently in voluntary research and campus programs (Piscitelli & D'Uggento, 2022). Consequently, this demographic structure signals that the spiritual and character-related dynamics observed in this study may be particularly relevant for early-year students who are still negotiating their academic and religious identities.

Religious affiliation represents another major dimension of the respondents' characteristics. A significant majority, 87.1 percent, identify as Seventh-day Adventists—a predictable outcome given the institutional affiliation of Universitas Advent Indonesia. Adventist educational institutions are historically designed to integrate faith and learning, with strong emphasis on spiritual discipline, moral integrity, and service-oriented character formation. Therefore, the predominance of Adventist respondents reinforces the alignment between the research context and the theological foundations underpinning the study. Nevertheless, the presence of Protestant (11.4 percent) and Catholic (1.5 percent) students, though relatively small, adds a degree of denominational diversity that is analytically valuable. McGuire notes that religious identity shapes the ways individuals interpret and engage in spiritual practices such as prayer, meaning-making, and ritual participation (McGuire, 2008). Thus, these minority groups contribute important nuances to understanding variation in spiritual growth patterns, particularly regarding how different Christian traditions may approach character formation and devotional practices.

The distribution by faculty further sheds light on the academic environments that structure students' daily experiences and potentially influence their spiritual development. The Faculty of Nursing, which represents 43.9 percent of respondents, emerges as the dominant academic unit in the sample. This prominence is meaningful because nursing education is widely recognized for its integration of ethical responsibility, compassionate care, and holistic service—elements that resonate closely with spiritual development (Pesut, 2025). Nursing students often engage deeply with human vulnerability, empathy, and moral decision-making, all of which may heighten their sensitivity to spiritual values and character-building initiatives. The Faculty of Economics follows at 20.5 percent, indicating a substantial representation of students whose academic experiences revolve around rational analysis, organizational behavior, and ethical considerations in business. Meanwhile, students from Information Technology (14.4 percent), Philosophy (9.1 percent), Education and Teacher Training (8.3 percent), and Mathematics and Natural Sciences (3.8 percent) bring additional intellectual diversity.

This varied faculty representation is important in light of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that individuals' behaviors and values are shaped by the micro-environments they inhabit on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Students from more reflective disciplines, such as philosophy, may exhibit different forms of spiritual inquiry compared to those engaged in technical or applied fields. Similarly, students in education and social sciences may have a proneness to relational and humanistic forms of spirituality, which differ from the analytical and structural orientation of students in economics and natural sciences. Thus, the faculty distribution is more than a demographic detail; it establishes an academic ecology that interacts with personal spirituality in complex ways.

Ethnic composition adds yet another layer of interpretive significance. More than half of the respondents (52.3 percent) are of Batak ethnicity—an observation that aligns with demographic patterns in the Indonesian Adventist community, which has a strong presence in North Sumatra. Siregar notes that Batak culture is characterized by strong communal ties, respect for authority, and deeply rooted Christian traditions, all of which contribute to robust religious adherence (Siregar, 2017). These cultural traits may influence Batak students to engage more consistently in religious practices and character formation activities. The presence of respondents from East Nusa Tenggara (12.9 percent), Papua (7.6 percent), Minahasa (5.3 percent), Sundanese (4.5 percent), Javanese (3.8 percent), and various other ethnicities (13.6 percent) illustrates the multicultural nature of the student population.

Cultural diversity is critical to understanding spiritual development, as Geertz argues that culture provides the interpretive framework through which individuals understand religious symbols, rituals, and moral expectations (Geertz, 1973). For instance, students from Papua may bring with them strong communal spirituality and relational worldviews, while those from Java or Sunda may carry more meditative or syncretic expressions of spirituality.

These differences enrich the spiritual landscape of the campus and potentially influence variations in prayer habits, character-building processes, and spiritual outcomes measured in the study.

Taken as a whole, the demographic characteristics presented in Table 1 reveal a student population that is young, predominantly Adventist, academically diverse, and culturally pluralistic. These traits are crucial for interpreting the study's findings, as they form the contextual ecosystem within which prayer and character formation operate as predictors of spiritual growth (Schnitker et al., 2021). The strong representation of first-year students suggests that the findings may reflect spiritual dynamics in the formative stages of young adulthood, a period marked by heightened openness to faith-based guidance. The overwhelmingly Adventist identity of the respondents aligns naturally with the theological emphasis on prayer, moral discipline, and holistic development inherent in Adventist education. Meanwhile, the disciplinary and ethnic diversity enriches the analysis by revealing how spiritual development is influenced not only by religious instruction but also by academic environments and cultural backgrounds (Sahin, 2018).

From an applied perspective, these demographic findings carry implications for institutional practice. The university may benefit from designing spiritual development programs that cater specifically to first-year students, who form the majority and are in a critical stage of adjustment (Bowman & Small, 2010). Similarly, targeted approaches for students in faculties with lower representation may help ensure that spiritual formation is inclusive and not overly concentrated in particular academic areas. Moreover, the presence of students from non-Adventist backgrounds underscores the need for interdenominational sensitivity within spiritual programming, ensuring that minority groups feel welcomed and accommodated. Finally, acknowledging cultural diversity is essential for preventing a monolithic approach to spirituality; instead, programs should account for the multiplicity of cultural expressions and spiritual expectations present in the student body.

In summary, the demographic characteristics in Table 1 do more than describe the respondents: they shape the interpretive and conceptual landscape of the study. These characteristics highlight how spiritual growth is embedded in academic, cultural, and religious contexts that interact dynamically with students' lived experiences. Understanding these dynamics allows for a more nuanced and contextualized interpretation of the findings, reinforcing the importance of demographic awareness in studies of spirituality and character formation.

Descriptive Statistics of Spiritual Growth Dimensions

Table. 2 Descriptive Statistics of Spiritual Growth Dimensions

Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Abide in Christ	132	2	5	4.33	0.61	High level; students frequently read and integrate Scripture into their lives
Live by God's word	132	2	5	4.04	0.69	High; students show consistent commitment to understanding God's Word
Pray in Faith	132	3	5	4.25	0.59	High; prayer serves as the central practice in students' spiritual growth
Fellowship with believers	132	2	5	4.09	0.70	High; students demonstrate relative consistency in sharing their faith
Witness to the World	132	1	5	3.54	0.94	Moderate; service engagement is comparatively weaker than other dimensions
Minister to Others	132	1	5	3.84	0.80	Moderate to high; variability is observed in moral and character practice

Source: Authors' analysis of primary data (2025).

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of six central dimensions of spiritual growth: Abide in Christ, Live by God's Word, Pray in Faith, Fellowship with Believers, Witness to the World, and Minister to Others. These dimensions collectively capture both the inward and outward expressions of Christian spirituality among students (Fulton et al., 2015). As scholars of spiritual formation commonly argue, spiritual growth is a multidimensional process involving cognitive, affective, relational, and behavioral components (Foster, 1998). Thus, examining each dimension's mean score and variability enables a deeper understanding of the patterns of spiritual development among students in Christian higher education.

The first dimension, Abide in Christ, yields the highest mean score among all dimensions, with $M = 4.33$ and $SD = 0.61$. This categorization as “high” suggests that students regularly engage in Scripture reading, devotional reflection, and the integration of biblical principles into daily living. In Christian spirituality, the act of abiding in Christ is foundational, implying an ongoing relational dependence on Christ, and is traditionally associated with practices such as meditation on Scripture, obedience, and daily communion with God (Albota et al., 2002). The strong scores in this dimension indicate that students demonstrate an internalized and consistent devotional life. This aligns with literature pointing out that structured religious environments—such as Adventist universities—tend to foster robust habits of personal devotion through communal rhythms, campus worship, and Bible-centered curricula (Knight & Seeber, 2016). The moderate standard deviation ($SD = 0.61$) further suggests that the pattern is relatively uniform across the sample, reflecting a shared spiritual culture embedded in the institution.

The second dimension, Live by God’s Word, also falls within the high category, with $M = 4.04$ and $SD = 0.69$. This indicates that students not only read Scripture but also seek to apply biblical teachings in decision-making, ethical reasoning, and moral conduct. Living by God’s Word involves a cognitive understanding of Scripture as well as its practical internalization—an aspect essential to Christian moral formation (Stott et al., 2013). The consistency observed in this dimension reinforces the high levels of personal devotion noted earlier. As one of the central aims of Christian education is to shape worldview and ethical behavior through biblical foundations, the strong performance in this dimension reflects successful integration of faith and learning, a goal highlighted frequently in Adventist educational philosophy (Knight & Seeber, 2016). The slightly higher variability compared to the first dimension might be attributed to differences in students’ theological maturity or interpretive approaches to Scripture, as suggested by Smith (2009), who argues that application of Scripture is often influenced by prior spiritual nurturing and denominational exposures (J. Z. Smith, 2009).

The third dimension, Pray in Faith, also yields a high score ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.59$), demonstrating that prayer serves as a central devotional practice for students. Prayer represents both a personal and communal act of communication with God, and scholars consistently emphasize its centrality in shaping spiritual awareness, emotional resilience, and relational connectedness with the divine (Doehring, 2015). The data indicate that students not only acknowledge the importance of prayer but regularly incorporate it into their spiritual routines. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a strong and shared prayer culture, likely reinforced by institutional practices such as worship services, small group prayer meetings, and classroom devotions. This finding aligns with the broader literature showing that environments saturated with faith practices tend to normalize prayer as a daily habit, contributing significantly to spiritual formation (Lindholm & Astin, 2011).

The fourth dimension, Fellowship with Believers, exhibits a mean of 4.09 ($SD = 0.70$), also categorized as high. This dimension reflects students’ engagement in communal aspects of faith—sharing testimony, participating in spiritual discussions, and encouraging peers in their spiritual journeys. Christian spirituality is inherently communal, grounded in the ecclesial understanding that believers grow through fellowship, mutual exhortation, and shared experiences (Bonhoeffer, 1995). The high mean score indicates that students value and partake in such community practices. Yet, the slightly higher variability implies differences in students’ levels of social engagement or comfort in faith-sharing settings. This aligns with the findings of Park (2013), who notes that personality factors, cultural backgrounds, and prior church involvement significantly influence participation in communal spiritual life (Park et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the overall high score underscores the institution’s ability to cultivate a vibrant community culture that promotes relational dimensions of faith.

In contrast to the inward-facing dimensions, the fifth dimension, Witness to the World, obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.94$), categorized as moderate. This dimension refers to outward expressions of faith—service, evangelism, and social engagement grounded in Christian mission. The comparatively lower score indicates that while students maintain strong personal spiritual practices, these do not consistently translate into external mission-oriented actions. This gap between inward devotion and outward witness is well-documented in spiritual formation literature, where researchers note that personal piety often develops earlier and more consistently than outward expressions of service and mission (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). Students may feel more confident in prayer and Bible study than in public expressions of faith, especially if witnessing requires navigating social risk, cultural barriers, or unfamiliar service contexts. The relatively high standard deviation ($SD = 0.94$) signals substantial variability, suggesting that while some students are active in service and outreach, others remain hesitant or disengaged. Scholars have attributed such variability to factors such as personality traits, spiritual gifting, cultural attitudes toward evangelism, and personal comfort levels in public religious expression (Stetzer & Putman, 2006). For Christian higher education institutions, this finding points to a potential area requiring intentional programming and support.

The sixth dimension, Minister to Others, demonstrates a mean score of 3.84 and SD of 0.80, placing it in the moderate-to-high category. This dimension captures behavioral expressions of moral character, compassion, and service within the community—elements tied to both ethical reasoning and practical action. The score suggests that many students engage in acts of service, moral decision-making, and practical ministry, though not with the same consistency as inward spiritual disciplines. Ministering to others requires not only spiritual motivation but also opportunities, resources, and structured contexts in which service can occur—factors that may vary widely among students (Chen et al., 2014). The broader variability in this dimension indicates differences in students' levels of moral agency, leadership skills, and willingness to serve. While a substantial portion of the student body exhibits meaningful engagement in ministerial acts, others may require more guidance, mentorship, or experiential learning platforms to translate spiritual values into concrete behaviors.

Taken together, the results reveal a notable pattern: students exhibit stronger performance in inward spiritual disciplines—Abide in Christ, Live by God's Word, Pray in Faith, and Fellowship with Believers—whereas outward expressions of faith—Witness to the World and Minister to Others—are comparatively weaker. This asymmetry reflects a common developmental trajectory in Christian spirituality, where internal formation typically precedes external action (Mulholland Jr, 2016). It also suggests that while students possess strong personal devotion and spiritual awareness, they may lack equivalent engagement in mission-oriented activities that require relational outreach, community service, or public witness.

This distinction has broader implications for Christian higher education. As literature on faith integration argues, institutions must balance formation of the inner life with intentional cultivation of outward mission, ensuring that students not only grow inwardly but also embody faith through action (Dockery, 2018). The findings in Table 2 reveal that while personal spirituality is thriving, missional engagement requires strategic reinforcement. This may involve service-learning programs, mission trips, community outreach initiatives, and curricular components that merge theological reflection with practical action. As Palmer emphasizes, authentic spirituality manifests when inward conviction translates into outward compassion, justice, and service (Palmer et al., 2010).

In summary, the descriptive statistics in Table 2 illuminate the complex interplay between personal devotion, communal practices, and outward witness in the spiritual lives of students. While inward disciplines are robust and consistent, outward mission practices require strengthening. These findings underscore the need for holistic spiritual formation that integrates contemplation with action, faith with service, and personal conviction with public engagement.

Correlation Among Spiritual Growth Dimensions

Table 3. Correlation Among Spiritual Growth Dimensions

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	p-value	Interpretation
Abide in Christ	Live by God's word	0.795	<0.001	Very strong; engagement with Scripture is closely aligned with understanding God's Word
Live by God's word	Pray in Faith	0.803	<0.001	Very strong; prayer is strongly associated with comprehension of the Word
Pray in Faith	Fellowship with believers	0.684	<0.001	Strong; a consistent prayer life significantly influences faith witnessing
Witness to the World	Minister to Others	0.881	<0.001	Very strong; ministry and service are deeply connected with moral and character development

Source: Authors' analysis of primary data (2025).

The correlation matrix presented in Table 3 provides a rich empirical lens through which the multidimensional structure of spiritual growth can be interpreted, especially in the context of Christian higher education where the integration of faith and learning remains foundational. The remarkably high correlation between Abide in Christ and Live by God's Word ($r = 0.795$, $p < 0.001$) suggests not merely a statistical association, but a deep functional interdependence between relational spirituality and scriptural engagement. This finding aligns with long-standing theological perspectives which hold that intimacy with Christ is cultivated through a disciplined encounter with Scripture (Huda et al., 2019). In classical spiritual formation literature, abiding in Christ is portrayed as both a relational and ethical reality—one that requires believers to internalize divine teachings in a manner that shapes the dispositions of the heart (Mérieau et al., 2019). Thus, the strong correlation observed in the data empirically reinforces the claim that personal relationship with Christ is sustained by the cognitive and affective appropriation of

God's Word, demonstrating what Smith (2020) describes as the "inseparability of relational devotion and doctrinal comprehension." (C. Smith, 2020b)

The relationship between Live by God's Word and Pray in Faith is even slightly stronger ($r = 0.803$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the mutually reinforcing dynamics between scriptural understanding and prayerful dependence. This resonates with the theological argument that prayer and Scripture form the dual axis of spiritual formation: Scripture informs the content of prayer, while prayer nurtures receptivity to the transformative message of Scripture (Hall et al., 2021). Scholars in Christian spirituality have often argued that prayer which is detached from Scripture risks becoming a subjective emotional exercise, whereas Scripture without prayer risks becoming a mere intellectual pursuit devoid of personal encounter (Hughes, 2017). The very strong correlation thus confirms that students who display a deep commitment to biblical understanding also exhibit robust prayer practices, supporting the claim of McDonald that "scriptural cognition and devotional praxis operate symbiotically in the formation of mature Christian identity." The data thus carry implications for curriculum development within Christian universities, suggesting that pedagogical strategies which integrate exegetical study with reflective prayer disciplines may be more effective than approaches that separate cognitive theological instruction from spiritual practice.

A similarly meaningful pattern emerges in the correlation between Pray in Faith and Fellowship with Believers ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$), which, although slightly lower than the previous coefficients, remains strong and statistically compelling. This relationship highlights the social dimension of spirituality, affirming the idea that private devotional practices shape, and are shaped by, communal participation. In Christian spiritual theology, prayer is not understood solely as an individual endeavor but as a foundational discipline that nurtures the virtues—patience, humility, empathy—necessary for meaningful fellowship (M. A. White & Waters, 2015). Empirical studies on faith development among young adults indicate that those who engage in consistent personal prayer are more likely to participate in communal worship, mentorship groups, and peer fellowship (Ozaslan et al., 2022). The strong correlation found in the present study suggests that prayer may act as a catalyst for relational engagement, enabling students to enter communal spaces with greater spiritual receptivity and interpersonal openness. Moreover, fellowship itself is often viewed as the tangible expression of prayer's formative influence, since it is within community that believers practice forgiveness, encouragement, mutual accountability, and shared discernment (D. S. Jones, 2020). The data thus reveal the integrative nature of spiritual life, where inward devotion and outward relationality converge in the shaping of holistic Christian maturity.

The strongest relationship observed in the entire correlation matrix is between Witness to the World and Minister to Others ($r = 0.881$, $p < 0.001$), a coefficient that suggests near-functional unity between public testimony and acts of service. From a theological perspective, this finding aligns closely with the missional paradigm emphasized in both classical and contemporary Christian scholarship. Service to others is widely understood as one of the most concrete expressions of Christian witness, embodying what Bosch (2011) famously described as the "incarnational dimension of mission." The exceptionally high correlation indicates that students who exhibit a strong commitment to moral action and service are also those who tend to demonstrate bolder expressions of public faith (Ozaslan et al., 2022). Ministry, in this sense, becomes not merely a task-oriented activity but a character-driven expression of discipleship. This close association is also supported by recent empirical research suggesting that service-learning experiences—common in Christian higher education—significantly enhance students' sense of Christian identity, moral clarity, and readiness to witness publicly (D. A. Jones et al., 2020). The data therefore imply that the outward-facing dimensions of spirituality are mutually reinforcing: students who actively minister to others develop a stronger orientation toward witnessing, while those who witness publicly appear more motivated to engage in service as a lived expression of faith.

Taken together, these correlations reveal a cohesive pattern that underscores the integrated nature of spiritual formation. Rather than functioning as isolated competencies, the six dimensions appear to operate within a tightly interwoven spiritual ecosystem in which inward devotion, scriptural grounding, communal engagement, and outward ministry continually inform and reinforce one another. This aligns with the holistic models of Christian formation articulated by scholars such as Kretzschmar and Louw, who argue that authentic spiritual growth involves the harmonious cultivation of cognitive, affective, relational, and ethical dimensions of the Christian life (Kilian, 2016). The present findings strongly support the theoretical proposition that personal spirituality (abiding in Christ, prayer, scriptural understanding) cannot be meaningfully separated from communal and ethical expressions (fellowship, ministry, witness). Instead, spiritual growth emerges as a multi-directional process in which personal devotion fuels outward action, and outward engagement deepens inward transformation.

These empirical patterns also offer practical implications for institutions of Christian higher education. First, the strong relationships between scriptural understanding, prayer, and relational fellowship highlight the

importance of designing campus spiritual programs that integrate these elements rather than treating them as separate domains. For example, classroom instruction in biblical studies may be strengthened by incorporating reflective prayer practices, peer discussion groups, and service components that connect theological learning to lived experience. Second, the exceptionally high correlation between witnessing and ministry suggests that initiatives focused on community service, outreach, and engagement with broader social issues may function as powerful catalysts for deepening students' overall spiritual commitment. This is consistent with the literature on transformational learning, which emphasizes that experiential practices, especially those involving service to marginalized communities, significantly enhance moral development and faith ownership among young adults (Desai & Wane, 2022). Third, because spiritual growth dimensions reinforce one another, neglecting any single dimension—be it prayer, fellowship, or service—may risk weakening the overall formation process. Thus, institutions should adopt a holistic framework of spiritual development that addresses the full spectrum of personal, communal, and missional dimensions.

Furthermore, the correlations highlight the need for a balanced approach to spiritual education. The high associations among inward dimensions (abiding, prayer, Scripture) reflect students' strong internal spirituality, whereas the very strong bond between outward dimensions (witness, ministry) highlights the importance of cultivating ethical and social expressions of faith. Yet previous descriptive analysis revealed that outward-oriented dimensions lagged behind inward-focused ones. When viewed together, the two sets of findings suggest that although students possess strong internal spiritual practices, these have not yet fully translated into equally strong outward engagement. This gap between inward piety and outward service reflects a pattern noted in several contemporary studies on faith development in higher education institutions (J. Wright, 2021). The correlation data, however, show that when outward engagement does occur, it strongly aligns with moral and spiritual maturity—indicating that enhancing ministry opportunities may improve students' holistic formation.

The correlational findings illuminate the deep structural coherence that characterizes spiritual growth among students in Christian higher education. The data affirm longstanding theological and empirical insights about the mutually reinforcing nature of devotion, community, and service. They also call for pedagogical strategies that intentionally integrate these dimensions, ensuring that spiritual formation is approached as a holistic, interconnected process rather than a compartmentalized set of activities. In this way, the findings not only describe but also guide, encouraging educators, ministry leaders, and institutional policymakers to foster environments where inward devotion naturally flows into outward service, and where outward engagement deepens inward transformation.

Multiple Linear Regression: Predictors of Fellowship with Believers

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression: Predictors of Fellowship with Believers

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	β (Standardized)	p-value	Interpretation
Abide in Christ	0.10	0.12	0.12	Not significant; abiding in Christ shows only a small contribution to fellowship with believers
Live by God's Word	0.18	0.21	0.03	Significant; living by God's Word positively influences fellowship with believers
Pray in Faith	0.22	0.25	0.01	Significant; praying in faith is a key predictor of fellowship with believers
Witness to the World	0.15	0.19	0.04	Significant; witnessing to the world strengthens fellowship with believers
Minister to Others	0.28	0.31	<0.001	Highly significant; ministering to others is the strongest predictor of fellowship with believers

Source: Authors' analysis of primary data (2025).

The multiple linear regression analysis presented in Table 4 offers a detailed understanding of how various dimensions of spiritual practice contribute to Fellowship with Believers, a construct widely regarded as a central indicator of communal spiritual maturity within Christian formation. By examining the predictive power of Abide in Christ, Live by God's Word, Pray in Faith, Witness to the World, and Minister to Others, the model provides valuable insight into the relational dynamics that sustain vibrant Christian communities. Together, these predictors reflect a spectrum of spiritual disciplines that range from inward devotional practices to outward-facing expressions of faith. Their combined influence on fellowship underscores the interconnected nature of spiritual

life, where personal transformation, communal engagement, and missional involvement operate synergistically (C. Smith, 2020a).

The most striking result of the regression model is the role of Minister to Others, which emerges as the strongest and most statistically significant predictor of fellowship ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with a large body of theological and empirical literature emphasizing that acts of service serve as the primary medium through which Christian love is embodied and communal identity is strengthened (Bosch, 2011). In Christian theology, ministry is not merely a functional activity but an expression of agape—self-giving love that mirrors the life and teachings of Christ. As Louw asserts, service has a fundamentally relational quality, promoting empathy, solidarity, and mutual care within the body of believers (Brunsdon et al., 2020). The strong predictive value of ministry suggests that students who actively engage in acts of service are more likely to experience deeper connections with their peers, greater levels of trust, and a heightened sense of belonging within their faith community. Empirical studies in Christian higher education similarly highlight that service-learning and volunteer ministry programs significantly enhance students' relational integration and communal participation (D. A. Jones et al., 2020). Thus, the regression results not only confirm theoretical expectations but also underscore the practical importance of fostering service-oriented habits in educational and ecclesial settings.

The second strongest predictor, Pray in Faith ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = 0.01$), also reflects a core component of Christian spirituality that has been widely recognized as foundational for both individual formation and communal life. Prayer, particularly faith-driven prayer, functions as a spiritual discipline that shapes the believer's heart, nurtures humility, and strengthens relational bonds by creating shared spaces of vulnerability and spiritual dependence (Hall et al., 2021). Through prayer, individuals cultivate inner dispositions—patience, compassion, forgiveness—that make meaningful fellowship possible. Moreover, communal prayer practices, such as group devotions or intercessory gatherings, foster a sense of unity and shared identity (Hughes, 2017). The regression results suggest that students who exhibit strong prayer lives are more likely to engage authentically and consistently in communal fellowship. This finding is supported by empirical research showing that prayer promotes communal cohesion by aligning the values, hopes, and spiritual aspirations of believers (Mérieau et al., 2019). Thus, the significant predictive role of prayer reinforces the notion that communal fellowship is grounded in the cultivated inner life of believers.

Similarly, Live by God's Word is a significant predictor of fellowship ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.03$), highlighting the importance of scriptural obedience in shaping relational practices within Christian communities. Living according to Scripture involves more than intellectual understanding; it includes ethical behavior, moral discernment, and the embodiment of virtues such as kindness, patience, and humility (M. A. White & Waters, 2015). These virtues are essential for sustaining healthy fellowship, as they foster mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among believers. Scholars of Christian education have long argued that students who orient their lives around biblical principles are better equipped to navigate interpersonal conflict and contribute positively to communal life (C. Smith, 2020a). The regression results therefore lend empirical support to the claim that scriptural obedience functions as a relational catalyst, shaping behaviors and attitudes that promote unity. Furthermore, because Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the importance of community, hospitality, and mutual encouragement, individuals who internalize these teachings are more likely to participate actively in faith-based communal structures.

Another significant predictor, Witness to the World ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.04$), adds a missional dimension to the understanding of fellowship. This finding highlights the idea that shared purpose and collective engagement in evangelistic or missional activities reinforce communal cohesion. Scholars such as Wright and Bosch argue that mission is inherently communal—a shared calling that binds believers together through collective action, shared narratives, and unified spiritual identity. When individuals participate together in witnessing, whether through formal evangelism, outreach programs, or informal faith-sharing, they create strong relational ties rooted in purpose, sacrifice, and shared experience (C. J. H. Wright, 2025). This dynamic is reflected in contemporary studies showing that collaborative missional engagement enhances trust, solidarity, and spiritual intimacy among believers (McDonald, 2021). The regression findings thus underscore the notion that fellowship is strengthened not only through inward spiritual practices but also through outward engagement that unites believers in a common spiritual mission.

Interestingly, Abide in Christ, though positively associated with fellowship, does not reach statistical significance ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.12$). This result offers an intriguing nuance in understanding the relationship between personal spirituality and communal life. Theologically, abiding in Christ—remaining connected to Christ through intimacy, obedience, and trust—is often seen as the foundation of Christian discipleship (Foster, 2018). However, the regression suggests that while abiding may shape personal spiritual depth, it does not directly translate into

communal engagement unless expressed through other outward-oriented practices. Scholars such as Scorgie argue that inward devotion, though essential, requires external embodiment—service, fellowship, mission—to manifest its full relational and communal impact (Scorgie et al., 2016). The non-significant result may therefore indicate that the influence of abiding on fellowship is indirect, operating through mediating behaviors such as prayer, scriptural obedience, or ministry. This interpretation aligns with broader findings in the present study, which show stronger correlations between outward practices and fellowship than between purely inward practices and fellowship. In other words, while personal intimacy with Christ remains central to spiritual identity, it is the external expressions of this intimacy that most powerfully shape communal relationships.

Collectively, the regression results reveal a coherent pattern: outward-oriented spiritual practices—ministering, witnessing, and communal prayer—are stronger predictors of fellowship than inward devotional practices. This does not diminish the importance of inward spirituality but rather highlights the idea that Christian fellowship is built through relational, participatory, and communal expressions of faith. The findings echo the claims of Kretzschmar (2016), who argues that spiritual formation must integrate personal piety with communal responsibility in order to cultivate authentic Christian communities (Kretzschmar & Clevers, 2016). They also support empirical research showing that fellowship flourishes when individuals share in collective spiritual action rather than merely cultivating isolated devotional practices (D. A. Jones et al., 2020). As such, the regression provides empirical grounding for holistic models of Christian formation that emphasize the integration of inward devotion, outward service, and communal mission.

From an educational perspective, these findings carry significant implications for curriculum development, campus ministry programming, and institutional spiritual formation strategies. Because Minister to Others stands out as the strongest predictor, Christian higher education institutions should consider integrating service-learning, volunteer ministry, and community engagement initiatives more intentionally into their spiritual formation frameworks. Programs that encourage students to serve together—whether in local outreach, peer mentoring, or mission trips—may play a crucial role in strengthening campus fellowship. Likewise, the significance of Pray in Faith and Live by God's Word suggests that chapel programs, small-group Bible studies, and structured discipleship initiatives should be designed to foster both personal devotion and relational accountability (Nelmes, 2025). Meanwhile, the significance of Witness to the World highlights the need for opportunities that encourage students to participate in evangelistic and missional activities as communities rather than isolated individuals.

Finally, the regression underscores the multi-dimensional nature of fellowship: it is not merely an emotional sense of togetherness but a spiritual, ethical, and missional reality shaped by collective practices. Fellowship thrives when believers share in prayer, live out Scripture, embody service, and unite in mission. The findings thus enrich both theological reflection and practical ministry by demonstrating that fellowship is not an accidental by-product of shared belief, but a cultivated outcome of embodied spiritual disciplines (Sijuwade, 2025). In sum, the regression findings deepen our understanding of how spiritual practices—when lived out both personally and communally—create the relational bonds that characterize authentic Christian fellowship.

The findings of this study indicate a consistent pattern of robust inward spiritual practices among students, particularly in the areas of prayer, engagement with Scripture, and abiding in Christ. These internal forms of devotion align with previous research identifying such practices as foundational components of spiritual resilience and psychological well-being in university populations. Evidence from international studies shows that regular spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and reflective engagement with sacred texts are associated with enhanced emotional regulation, improved coping capacities, and a stronger sense of purpose. These effects appear to be especially pronounced during periods of crisis, when spirituality functions as a stabilizing resource that supports students' mental and emotional health (de Brito Sena et al., 2021).

The strong performance in Pray in Faith and Abide in Christ reflects patterns reported in recent research, which shows that students with higher levels of religious engagement tend to exhibit greater emotional regulation and reduced stress (Fradelos et al., 2025). Such evidence supports the view that inward spirituality serves as a stabilizing foundation, fostering moral discernment and psychological resilience throughout the formative stages of academic life.

The comparatively low level of engagement in Witness to the World suggests that many students may struggle to translate inward convictions into outward missional expression. Although they often exhibit strong private spirituality, students may remain hesitant to articulate their faith publicly due to factors such as personal insecurity, cultural sensitivity, or concerns about being misunderstood. Similar patterns have been documented in empirical studies involving adolescents and university students. For example, a recent mixed-methods study conducted among young adults in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic found that internal religiosity was

positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas external religious practices—more public expressions of faith—showed a stronger relationship with reductions in stress. Such findings indicate a nuanced interplay between private belief and public religious expression, highlighting the need for intentional support within higher-education environments to help students bridge this gap (Aune et al., 2025).

According to the regression analysis, Minister to Others is the strongest predictor of fellowship, highlighting the pivotal role of service in fostering communal spiritual life. This finding is consistent with extensive research on service-learning, which indicates that engagement in acts of service enhances empathy, strengthens group cohesion, and supports moral and spiritual development. For example, studies have shown that participation in international service-learning programs within nursing education promotes spiritual growth, teamwork, and cultural humility, demonstrating how service experiences can simultaneously nurture personal virtue and collective relational bonds (Digges & Faw, 2023). Additionally, participation in service-learning has been linked to gains in emotional intelligence, empathy, social awareness, and interpersonal skills (Pong & Lam, 2023). Qualitative research among youth engaged in faith-based service-learning programs further indicates that service experiences enhance spiritual mentoring relationships and foster character development (Silaban et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that shared acts of service function as a conduit, translating personal spirituality into outward witness while cultivating deeper, relationally grounded spiritual communities.

Participation in service-learning has been associated with improvements in emotional intelligence, empathy, social awareness, and interpersonal skills, highlighting its role in fostering both personal and social development (Pong & Lam, 2023). These findings suggest that engagement in acts of service can serve as a conduit for translating personal spirituality into relational and communal expression, supporting the development of deeper, socially connected spiritual communities.

Research on spiritual formation demonstrates that intimacy with Christ often initiates an internal process of spiritual renewal that precedes observable changes in interpersonal, relational, or communal behaviors. Although Abide in Christ did not emerge as a direct predictor of fellowship in the regression analysis, spiritual-formation frameworks consistently describe transformation as an inside-out movement: an inward encounter with God characterized by silence, attentiveness, restoration, and personal surrender, which gradually matures into outward expressions of compassion, service, and relational depth. These frameworks suggest that the deepest shifts in belief, motivation, and disposition occur long before they appear in visible acts of ministry or communal engagement. Consequently, despite its modest direct statistical effect, Abide in Christ may operate as a foundational and indirect spiritual force—one that subtly strengthens other dimensions of spirituality and ultimately contributes to communal life in ways that are more enduring, integrative, and qualitatively transformative (Gardner, 2015).

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that spiritual formation in Christian higher education is most effective when internal devotion—prayer, Scripture engagement, and abiding in Christ—is intentionally integrated with outward expressions of faith such as service, witnessing, and fellowship. Empirical evidence reinforces the value of this holistic approach. A study published in *Religions* indicates that inward spiritual disciplines cultivate identity, emotional resilience, and moral grounding, whereas service-oriented and communal activities provide concrete avenues for translating personal faith into relational and social engagement (Bensaid, 2021). These findings suggest that higher education institutions should design curricula that intentionally nurture both contemplative spirituality and active ministry. Through such integration, universities can develop graduates who embody purpose, compassion, and integrity (Fuertes & Dugan, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study examines the dynamic relationship between inward spiritual disciplines and outward expressions of faith among university students within a Christian higher education context. The findings indicate that students at Universitas Advent Indonesia demonstrate strong personal spirituality, particularly in the areas of prayer, engagement with Scripture, and abiding in Christ. These inward practices serve as core components of their spiritual identity and form a foundational basis for resilience, emotional stability, and moral discernment. In this regard, personal devotion not only sustains students' inner spiritual life but also shapes the values and dispositions that inform their broader engagement within the faith community.

However, the comparatively lower level of engagement in witnessing to others suggests that interior devotion does not automatically translate into outward missional practice. This divergence reflects broader generational patterns in which young adults demonstrate a strong desire for authenticity and personal introspection, yet often

exhibit hesitation or uncertainty when it comes to publicly articulating their faith. These findings underscore the importance of developing targeted and contextually sensitive strategies that can help students bridge the gap between personal conviction and relational or missional expression.

The regression analysis highlights the critical role of moral conduct and service in shaping communal spiritual life. Ministering to others emerged as the strongest predictor of fellowship, indicating that shared acts of compassion form a core foundation of spiritual cohesion within the community. Prayer and adherence to God's Word also demonstrated significant effects on fellowship, suggesting that personal spiritual disciplines meaningfully reinforce interpersonal spiritual relationships. Taken together, these findings indicate that prayer, Scripture engagement, and service function not only as markers of spiritual maturity but also as active catalysts in fostering communal spiritual development.

The implications for Christian higher education are evident: effective spiritual formation must integrate both contemplative and practice-oriented components. Institutions are encouraged to design curricular and co-curricular initiatives that deepen personal spiritual commitment while simultaneously expanding opportunities for service, outreach, and collaborative ministry. Through such an approach, universities can more effectively cultivate graduates who embody a well-rounded spirituality—anchored in Christ, shaped by Scripture, sustained through prayer, and expressed through acts of love-driven service.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that prayer and moral character serve as key determinants of spiritual growth. When intentionally nurtured, these dimensions have the potential to shape students into compassionate leaders who contribute meaningfully to both the church and the broader global community. To deepen understanding of spiritual formation across diverse higher education settings, future research may investigate how cultural, relational, and institutional factors influence the transformation of internal spirituality into outward mission and purposeful engagement.

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