

THE EFFECT OF A MANUALIZED GROUP TREATMENT PROTOCOL
ON GOD IMAGE AND ATTACHMENT TO GOD

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF A MANUALIZED GROUP TREATMENT PROTOCOL ON GOD IMAGE AND ATTACHMENT TO GOD

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Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling

This study tested the effect of a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God in a sample of college students attending a Christian college. Thirty undergraduate students from a homogenous population were tested with one measure of God attachment, two measures of God image, one measure of religious coping, and one measure of spiritual outcomes. It was hypothesized that significant God image and attachment to God change would occur among the treatment group participants. In addition, it was hypothesized that significant religious coping and spiritual outcome change would occur among the treatment group and comparable group participants. The results indicated significant spiritual outcome change and some God image change. In particular, the strongest finding of this study was the treatment group and comparable

group participants reported increased love of God, others, and self after participating in a manualized group treatment protocol.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the students of Free Will Baptist Bible College. From 2005 until 2011 I was encouraged, challenged, and inspired by these genuine students as I served them as Psychology Program Coordinator. Throughout the Ph.D. process in general, and the dissertation process in particular, these students were supportive and interested in my continued education. The students who willingly participated in the research study for this dissertation were committed to the process, and for them, I am most grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The theoretical underpinnings of God image and emotional attachment to God are object relations theory (Klein, 1930/1964) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), respectively. Both of these theories have a solid research foundation in general. In particular, God image development (Rizzuto, 1979) and God attachment development (Kirkpatrick, 1992) begin in childhood and persist throughout the lifespan; yet, God image and God attachment change are possible through treatment (Rizzuto, 1974). Thus, the researcher hypothesizes that utilizing a manualized group process with the college student population will result in more positive God images and more secure attachment to God (Moriarty, 2006; Thomas, 2009).

Significance of the Study

Current popular culture is interested in the myriad of God images present in the world. *USA Today* printed a front page article on views of God present in American culture (Grossman, 2010). Four God images prevalent in today's society were named—authoritative, benevolent, critical, and distant. The authoritative God image is the view that God is engaged in history and is harshly punishing those who do not follow him. The benevolent God image is characterized by the belief that God is a force for good that cares for all people and has their best interest at heart. The critical God image carries the

belief that God keeps an eye on the exploitation and suffering in this world but delivers justice in the next world, which is heaven. The distant God image is a view of God as creator of the world, who has since left humanity alone. These God images are believed to influence people in their views of daily life and world events.

It seems that God image and emotional attachment to God are influential for the vast number of people in any given culture, especially in America. Furthermore, most people report that they believe in God, but few people report feeling satisfied in their religious activities (Clinton & Straub, 2010). Such correlations point to the need for effective interventions for God image and attachment to God change. Using a sample of college students, internal spirituality characterized by intellectual activities, such as searching for truth and applying it to life, and inner peace were identified as more desirable than external characteristics, such as a law-oriented and cognitively closed religious system (Cook, Borman, Moore, & Kunkel, 2000). Knowing about God is not enough. Emotional connection to God is important, too.

The college context is a primary influence and critical period for personality development, social development, and spiritual development. Coping skills, self-esteem, and embracing or rejecting views of parents are just a few examples of issues faced by the average college student. College students' disturbingly high dropout rate with regard to church and other overt religious practices during or following college has been of great concern (Budziszewski, 1999). LifeWay Research (2007) revealed that two-thirds of young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 stop attending church regularly. The top reason for dropping out of church was "I simply wanted a break from church." The

second most popular reason was “I moved to college and stopped attending church.”
Could it be that these students are experiencing negative God images and insecure attachment to God?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Does a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God result in more positive God images and more secure attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college?

Research Question 2

Does a manualized group treatment result in more positive patterns of religious coping and an increase in love of God, others, and self in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college?

Limitations

The most noteworthy limitation in this study was the participants were limited to college students attending a conservative Christian college. In 2008-2009, the American Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) reported 34,592 students attended 101 ABHE accredited colleges in the United States (ABHE, 2009). Though this is a significant population, there are thousands of college students who endorse Christianity who do not attend conservative Christian colleges. Also, the sample used in this study will not include anyone from the clinical population. Both of these populations—Christian college students not attending Christian colleges and the clinical population—are beyond the scope of this study.

Definitions

God attachment is defined as one's emotional attachment to God. In this attachment relationship God serves as a secure base in which God is a safe haven in times of distress and there is freedom to explore in times of security. Secure attachment to a primary caregiver is correlated with a secure attachment to God (Birky & Ball, 1988). Insecure attachment to a primary caregiver has been correlated with an insecure attachment to God (McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005). However, those with an anxious, avoidant, or ambivalent type of insecure attachment to parents may develop a secure attachment with God in which God compensates for the lack of secure parental attachment (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

The God concept is best defined as one's intellectual, theological understanding of God. It includes the personality traits and qualities that an individual cognitively believes God to possess (Thomas, 2009).

God image is the way in which a person emotionally experiences God. There is much greater variability among God images in individuals within the Christian tradition than there is among God concepts. The God image is a psychological construct concerned with how an individual feels toward God and one's impression of how God feels about him or her (Grimes, 2007).

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two is a review of literature covering object relations theory, attachment theory, the development of the God image and the development of attachment to God. Parental and self-esteem influences on God image and attachment to God are also included. The literature review concludes with discussion on God image treatment and change and group therapy.

Chapter Three is a description of the methods for the study. Information on participants, the setting, the research design, the therapists, the treatment, measures, and quantitative methodology are included, as well as some of the statistical analyses that were pertinent to the study's results. Chapter Four is the analysis of the data and the quantitative results. Chapter Five is a summary of the study and includes conclusions, implications for practice, implications for research, and recommendations.

Multiple appendices are included to provide in-depth information regarding research participant consent and demographic data gathering, the measures that were administered, and the group leader and participant manuals.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Object relations theory and attachment theory provide the theoretical underpinnings for the development of the God image and attachment to God. More specifically, the role of parents and the impact of self-esteem are prevalent in the literature. God image and attachment to God treatment and change are highlighted in this review of literature due to the primary focus of the proposed study. Group therapy is also discussed.

Development of the God Image and Attachment to God

Object Relations Theory

Object relations theory grew out of Freud's (1913) psychoanalytic theory. It was developed by Klein (1930/1964) to counteract the organically based stages of development in the psychoanalytic theory. Klein emphasized the role of interpersonal relationships, primarily the relationship to mother, in the development of a child. The innate drives of an infant are directed at objects or people; therefore, the context of a relationship between the infant and such objects is the basis of the theory. The objects can be internal or external. Initial external objects are typically mother or father. Internal

objects are inner representations or images of these parental figures (external objects). The individual creates internal objects in order to understand the self. They are the result of encounters with objects, and they influence a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Rizzuto, 2005). An infant needs to be cared for in a safe environment in order to emerge as a healthy separate individual later in life. McDargh (1986) states, "The human person is born with a primary and irreducible need for the confirmation and affirmation of relationship" (p. 255). Furthermore, one's concept of the self and God must be viewed from the standpoint of a relationship.

God Image

The development of the God image from the object relations perspective can be traced back to Rizzuto (1979). Rizzuto suggested that God is internalized in a similar manner as primary caregivers, but with God, an internal image is required to understand God and to relate to God (Rizzuto, 2005). God images develop from one's object relations, evolving self-representations, and environmental belief systems (Rizzuto, 1979).

Primary caregivers influence the development of God images. The God representation can also be a transitional object (term coined by Winnicott, 1951), in which the God representation takes the place of the mother-child bond (McDargh, 1986). God images are a source for understanding a person's faith, spirituality, and religious practices; furthermore, everyone has some representation of God (Peloso, 2008). Discovering themes in God images, comparing God images across cultures, and

understanding the impact of cultural perspectives on God is a daunting task. Among a sample of Roman Catholic participants, the top four God images were love, creator, always present, and friend (Peloso, 2008). God images related to the acts of God, more specifically, His acts of power, were the most common among a sample of Dutch adolescents (Janssen, De Hart, & Gerardts, 1994). De Roos (2006) explored the God concepts of young children; and suggests the God concept of a child is impacted by family and school contexts and that parental and teacher relationships can compensate for each other. Hall (2004) suggests that implicit relational representations help to explain the link between religious involvement, specifically Christian spirituality, and mental health.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969, 1982) is credited as the father of attachment theory. He postulated the primary tenants of attachment, which have led to a variety of applications in psychological research. The basic assumption of attachment theory is that people have the fundamental capacity to form a secure sense of the self and the world if caregivers are consistently accessible and responsive to bids for comfort and protection. His radical idea was that caregivers are not interchangeable. Bowlby coined the term *working models* which are internalized, organized expectations of relationships that persist throughout one's development. Perceived threats activate one's attachment system, and the result is seeking proximity to the attachment figure for safety. Attachment developments

throughout the lifespan, and specifically God attachment, are important concepts in attachment theory research.

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) and many others (Carlson, 1998; Egeland & Farber, 1984; Karen, 1994; Sroufe & Waters, 1977) have researched the phenomenon of infant/primary care giver attachment styles. Ainsworth et al. (1978) developed the strange situation procedure, in which anxiety was created for an infant, in order to measure and categorize attachment. The three attachment styles that emerged from this research were secure, avoidant, and ambivalent.

Secure attachment in infants is characterized by exploration, missing the parent during separation, preference for the parent over a stranger, greeting the parent actively, and settling and returning to play when reunited with the parent.

Avoidant attachment in an infant is characterized by failure to cry when the infant is separated from the parent and avoiding or ignoring the parent when she returns. There appears to be an unemotional response to the appearance of the parent, and the child is focused on the toys throughout the procedure.

Next, resistant or ambivalent attachment styles among infants tend to include distress prior to parent separation, and therefore, the environment is explored very little. The infant may appear to be preoccupied with the parent and would continue to cry when reunited with the parent.

The fourth category, disorganized, was developed later by Main and Solomon (1990). Disorganized attachment has been correlated with unresolved fear in which the attachment figure serves as a source of alarm rather than safety. Trauma and

psychopathology tend to continue across the lifespan (Cassidy & Mohr, 2001).

Disorganized or disoriented attachment in infancy is characterized by disorienting behaviors in the presence of the parent.

The development of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main, 2000) has been a significant benefit to attachment theory research and has added insight to the persistence of attachment styles throughout life (Hesse, 1999). Attachment styles in infancy, gleaned from strange situation behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990), and adult attachment categories, from the AAI (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), correspond with each other (Hesse, 1999).

Secure or autonomous attachment in adults includes a coherent and collaborative discourse of attachment related experiences. The corresponding adult attachment state of mind for avoidant attachment is dismissing. This includes normalizing or generalizing history. The dismissing adult tends to be brief in the interview and dismisses attachment related re-experiences. The next corresponding adult attachment style is called preoccupied. In this case, the AAI dialogue is not coherent. The person is preoccupied with past attachments and may present as angry, passive, or fearful. Lastly, unresolved or disorganized adult attachment typically includes a lapse in discourse or monitoring during discussions of abuse. For example, the interviewee may verbally indicate that a deceased person is alive (Hesse, 1999).

Attachments persist throughout life, and Ainsworth (1985) suggested that emotional bonds with attachment components that provide a sense of security are the most important elements of social relationships and social systems. More recently,

attachment theory has influenced research on adult interpersonal relationships, emotional expression, coping skills, moral reasoning, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Rice, 1990; Searle & Meara, 1999; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Van Ijzendoorn & Zwart-Woudstra, 1995).

In childhood, early attachment representations are believed to generalize which then provide a guide for attachment related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors beyond the parent-infant relationship, primarily to peer and romantic relationships (Sroufe et al., 2005). Using university students as the sample, Rice and Mirzadeh (2000) examined the relationships among perfectionism, attachment, academic integration, and depression. One's attachment style predicted the individual's type of perfectionism, in which adaptive perfectionists—those with high self-standards, order, and organization but not at the expense of self-esteem— reported more secure attachments, better academic integration, and less depression.

Attachment to God

Kirkpatrick (1992) asserts that foundational concepts of the attachment theory—the presence of an available and responsive attachment figure, who serves as a secure base, and separation from whom results in distress—are fundamental dynamics of Christianity. The Christian belief system asserts that God is personal, loving, forgiving, everywhere present within creation, and is unchanging in his perfection (Erickson, 1998). Furthermore, attachment theory provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding many aspects of religious belief and behavior (Clinton & Straub, 2010;

Kirkpatrick, 1997, 1998). Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) revealed that participants with a secure attachment style reported greater religious commitment and more positive images of God than participants with an insecure attachment style. It is suggested that romantic love and religion can be thought of as parallel; furthermore, participants with a secure God attachment reported greater life satisfaction, less anxiety, less loneliness, less depression, and less physical illness.

Two models relating to God as an attachment figure are the correspondence model and the compensatory model (Hall, 2007). The correspondence model suggests that attachment patterns among humans are reflected in attachment patterns to God. The compensatory model states that God functions as a substitute attachment figure for those with an insecure attachment pattern. Some research evidence supports the correspondence model and others support the compensatory model. Beck and MacDonald (2004) have attempted to tie the two competing theories together in a more cohesive fashion, suggesting they are both valid, but each becomes more prominent under certain circumstances. In order to help clarify some of the ambiguity between these models, Hall, Fujikawa, Halcrow, Hill, and Delaney (2009) suggest the difference in the correspondence and compensation models is at the level of implicit relational information processing because human attachment patterns and spiritual experiences both operate from implicit relational knowledge.

Those with secure attachment to a parent may experience socialized correspondence, in which religiosity reflects social learning of parents' religious standards (Kirkpatrick, 1999). Those with insecure attachment to a parent may

experience emotional compensation, in which religiosity includes an emotional regulation strategy to obtain or maintain a sense of felt security. Or, the person with insecure attachment may experience longitudinal compensation, in which religiosity is tied to the attachment system and is prone to increase over time. Correspondence is linked to close friendships with believers and membership in religious organizations. Compensation is linked to emotional turmoil, relationship problems, personal crises, and mental or physical illness (Granqvist, 2002).

The results of Kirkpatrick and Shaver's (1990) study support the compensation model relating to avoidant attachment to parents and subsequent, substitute attachment to God. They suggest that early attachment experiences relate to religious experiences due to similarities in both types of relationships. Sudden conversions were reported most often among those with avoidant maternal attachment. Moreover, insecure attachment was positively linked to emotionally based religiosity and sudden religious conversion (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999). Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) report similar findings with regard to the correspondence and compensatory roles of God in the lives of individuals with secure and insecure childhood maternal attachments, respectively speaking. It seems the unconditional love of God may appeal to the person who feels unworthy of love (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

The hypothesis that one with a secure God attachment would be more likely to explore his theological world was supported in a study by Beck (2006). Using Christian college students as the participants, God as a secure base was manifested specifically when God was perceived as a source of support and strength. Theological exploration

involved religious curiosity, effort spent in exploring different theological ideas, and openness to new religious ideas. One with a secure God attachment tended to engage in theological exploration with peace and joy, or in other words, anxiety free exploration. An important note regarding this study is the participants did not stray in such a way that resulted in a rejection of core Christian doctrine.

Byrd and Boe (2001) studied three types of prayer—conversational, contemplative, and materialistic-help-seeking—and attachment styles as a way to assess the concept of proximity seeking in one’s relationship with God. Those with avoidant attachment tended to engage in less prayer overall and those with anxious attachment tended to engage in materialistic-help-seeking prayer only.

The neurobiology of religious experience enhances attachment theory insights, specifically with regard to implicit relational meaning (Seybold, 2005). Hall (2007) presents the idea of a knowledge spiral, in which implicit and explicit knowledge about one’s sense of self refer to each other, and such communication promotes reflective self-functioning. This reflective capacity contains implications for relational and spiritual development from the attachment theory perspective.

Miner (2007) suggests that some theories of attachment to God lack a clear theological basis—Kirkpatrick’s cognitive-affective model, for example— and therefore weakens God attachment theories. The current weaknesses include reductionism, failure to fully consider the attributes of God, and an oversight of human inter-subjectivity. Miner promotes Trinitarian theology in which God is knowable, relational, and communicable; moreover, a relationship with God is circular and reciprocal. This

theological foundation strengthens one's understanding of the development of God attachment.

To get more depth related to God attachment, the God Attachment Interview has been developed and validated (Proctor, Miner, McLean, Devenish, & Bonab, 2009).

Parents' Influence on God Image and Attachment to God

The God concept is more correlated with the preferred parent (Nelson, 1971); and furthermore, there are a wide variety of God images (Spilka, Armatas, & Nussbaum, 1964). The Adlerian God concept has been preferred over the Freudian view in many studies on God images (Nelson, 1971; Spilka, Addison, & Resensohn, 1975).

Parental images and divine images are partially products of one's developmental history. Tenderness, authority, and firmness were revealed as images of parents and God (Tamayo & Desjardins, 1976). The combination of mother and father parental images had a more significant impact on the development of God images in Birky and Ball's (1988) study. God concepts are influenced by relationships with parents, and internal representations of the self and others influence the development of and positively correlate to one's God images (Brokaw & Edwards, 1994), specifically between family social structure and God images (Hertel & Donahue, 1995). Consistency and similar religious beliefs and practices between parents has an effect on religious transmission to adolescent children (Bader & Desmond, 2006).

Granqvist (2002) suggested that parental attachment, rather than peer attachment, supports the socialized correspondence and emotional compensation hypotheses.

Adolescents with secure parental attachments were less likely to reject the influence of parental standards. Secure attachment was a strong predictor of spiritual maturity when compared to measures of parental bonding—including parental warmth, empathy, affection, and closeness. Indicators of spiritual maturity included personal relationship with God and service to others (TenElshof & Furrow, 2000). An implication from this study is the need for mentoring and nurturing students and encouraging them to strengthen their own attachments. Attachment to mother seems to be primary when predicting a level of self-esteem and relationship with God (Reinert, 2005).

McDonald et al. (2005) explored the relationship between the parent-child attachment and attachment to God. The results of this study suggest emotionally cold or unspiritual families tend to produce increased God avoidance, but not God anxiety. A religious home with a lack of intimacy seems to result in being more dismissing of God. Those from rigid, authoritarian homes reported greater God anxiety and avoidance. Those with hypocritical fathers had a more avoidant relationship with God. Those who reported having parents who did not rely on God had more difficulty relying on God themselves. This study supports the correspondence model, although, this trend is most evident among those with a dismissing attachment style.

Self-Esteem and God Image and Attachment to God

Several studies suggest the connection between attachment style and the development of the self (Mikulincer, 1995). Soares, Lemos, and Almeida (2005) suggest that adolescents with a secure attachment style exhibit more constructive motivational

strategies in the face of stressful situations compared to adolescents with insecure attachment styles. Benson and Spilka (1973) used Catholic subjects in their study and found that self-esteem positively influenced descriptions of God as loving and accepting.

Roberts, Gotlib, and Kassel (1996) suggest that insecure attachment styles are associated with dysfunctional attitudes, which then lead to lower levels of self-esteem. Rice and Lopez (2004) used the attachment theory to assess the mediating qualities of attachment security and perfectionistic self-doubt and self-esteem. Implications are presented for the counseling context, and one implication is that students with insecure attachments may have a broader self-critical and ruminative cognitive-affective interpersonal pattern.

God Image and Attachment to God Treatment and Change

Representations of God have the potential to change and develop over the course of time (McDargh, 1986; Rizzuto, 1974). Rizzuto (1974) claimed God images could change in four ways. First, gaining a new understanding of objects from which the original God image developed could then result in a changed internal God representation. Second, when changes in relationships with caregivers occur, God images may subsequently change. Third, present relationships can have an effect on emotional experiences of God. Fourth, new religious teaching could impact images of God.

Many subsequent theoretical articles have explored the effects of psychotherapy on images of God. Jacques (1998) suggested that therapy could impact negative or maladaptive thinking occurring in one's relationship with God. Implicit and explicit

memory change comes from a spirit of interaction that provides new implicit relational knowledge (Fosshage, 2003). Inquiry is more related to explicit memory. This process provides two new pathways to change.

Due to the effects on the developing brain of traumatic or painful relationship experiences, the counseling experience may change God images by way of neural network change (Garzon, 2007; Sperry, 2005). An understanding of neuroscience and the impact of early relationships on the brain can help therapist effectiveness because relational connections become neural connections. Healthy neural and psychological development is dependent on the responsiveness of attachment figures (Schore, 2002).

God image change may result from prayer, meditation, and spiritual imagery exercises (O'Grady & Richards, 2007). Inner healing exercises based on spiritual imagery may also lead to God image change (Noffke & Hall, 2007). To encounter God as safe and loving is important in each of these interventions. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) techniques have been theorized to impact God image as one disputes irrational beliefs about God in the therapeutic context (Johnson, 2007). Moriarty (2006) developed a God image thought record to aid individuals in combating irrational God images.

From the attachment theory perspective, the relationship formed between a therapist and a client can provide a secure base for the client. The therapist can then aid the client in deconstructing past attachment patterns and constructing new attachment patterns in the present (Wallin, 2007). Forming a new attachment relationship has the power to be transformative. Metacognitive understanding is also posited as crucial for

client change (Main, 1995). Building on Main's metacognition, incorporating mentalization and mindfulness into therapy can also lead to attachment style change (Fonagy et al., 1995).

Furthermore, there have been few studies that have attempted to determine the effect of therapy on God image and attachment to God. Using a religious object relations therapy aimed at improving self-esteem and the God image in an inpatient setting of 99 participants resulted in improved self-esteem, and emotional experience of God became more like the cognitive understanding of God among the participants (Tisdale et al., 1997). Treatment on a sample of individuals in inpatient settings, followed by outpatient therapy, resulted in improved self-esteem and improved emotional experience of God, and the results were maintained through the 12-month follow-up (Key, 1995). Cheston, Piedmont, Eanes, and Lavin (2003) investigated the change in images of God in 30 individuals engaged in an outpatient therapy group that was not explicitly religious or spiritual. The most significant aspect of the participant's God image that changed was agreeableness, which is related to compassion; as compared to the no-treatment control group which showed no changes.

Group therapy specifically aimed at improving God images has shown promising results (O'Hare, 2003; Thomas, 2009). A small sample size ($n = 6$) in O'Hare's (2003) pilot study is a limitation, but the results indicated that group work may improve the God image. Thomas (2009) tested the effect of a manualized group treatment protocol on God image. His study included 26 participants divided into seven therapy groups led by doctoral student clinicians. Each participant described himself or herself as within the

Christian tradition and indicated he or she had trouble experiencing God as loving, forgiving, and compassionate. Thomas's study confirmed the potential group work has for improving the God image using a manualized group protocol. Results indicated significant increases in the emotional experience of God as intimate, accepting, and supportive. Also, there were significant decreases in the emotional experience of God as distant, harsh, and disapproving. The participants also reported a significantly more secure and less avoidant ($t = 3.57, df = 19, p = 0.002$) and less anxious ($t = 4.24, df = 19, p = 0.001$) attachment to God. A small sample size and lack of a control group are limitations of this study. Furthermore, 10 participants were engaged in individual therapy for at least a portion of the study with presenting problems including depression, anxiety, and bi-polar disorder.

Group Therapy

Clinton and Straub (2010) assert people are wounded and healed in the context of relationships; therefore, the counseling context is an avenue to experience God image and attachment to God change. For over 100 years, group therapy has been empirically supported in a wide range of populations (Barlow, Burlingame, & Fuhriman, 2000). Randomized control group studies and other experimental designs have demonstrated that group therapy is efficacious for a variety of presenting problems, including depression (McDermut, Miller, & Brown, 2001), female survivors of sexual abuse (Gorey, Richter, & Snider, 2001), alcoholism, eating disorders, and inpatient populations in general (Barlow et al., 2000).

Yalom (1995) asserts “installation of hope, universality, imparting information, altruism, the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socialized techniques, imitative behavior, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, catharsis, and existential factors” (p. 1) are essential for effective group process. Maintaining confidentiality is also a key factor to a strong group (Parker, Clevenger, & Sherman, 1997). Based on Sartre’s philosophical underpinnings, Cannon (2005) strongly suggests that change in individuals is provoked, enhanced, and reinforced through group therapy. The group acts as a third party which produces genuine community, positive reciprocity, freedom of thought, and therefore, personal liberation. When these factors are in place, group therapy is most effective.

Psychoeducational groups and manualized group treatment also tend to include the aforementioned factors. In psychoeducational group contexts there is a need for interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions. Perkins (2002) suggests there is a greater likelihood for frustration and self-criticism in cases where these interactions are minimal or absent. Depending on the aim of the group, a variety of interventions may be added. For example, incorporating meditation, yoga, and/or hypnosis in psychoeducation and group therapy has shown promising results for subjects suffering from a depressed mood (Butler et al., 2008). Furthermore, manualized group treatment protocols have been encouraged in order to ensure similarity of treatment across groups (Sanderson, 2006). Also, other therapists may then obtain and utilize manuals that have been found to be efficacious.

A limitation of the literature is the rarity of studies documenting the effects of therapeutic interventions on attachment to God change in general, with even fewer studies utilizing group process. No studies have been found that include a control group. The current study is aimed to address these limitations by adding to the literature on God image and attachment to God change through a manualized group protocol. Furthermore, this study will analyze the data of this group compared to a comparable group and a wait list control group and will not include the clinical population.

Proposed Study

Research indicates that the God image is not a fixed construct (Rizzuto, 1974) and one way to improve God image is through psychotherapy. Several studies have shown the efficacy of individual therapy on God image change. Currently, two studies have looked at the effect of group therapy on God image (O'Hare, 2003; Thomas, 2009). Further research containing a comparable group and a control group is needed to determine the efficacy of group therapy on improving God image and attachment to God. The purpose of this study is to assess the effects of a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college. The treatment group manual is entitled *Discovering God*. The purpose of the manual is to help individuals within the Christian tradition to experience God in a manner more congruent with their cognitive understanding (Thomas, 2009).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis A

There will be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God. Participants in the treatment group will report a more secure and less avoidant and/or anxious attachment to God as measured by significantly lower scores on the AGI compared to participants in the comparable group and the wait list control group.

Hypothesis B

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God, participants in the treatment group will report more positive God images as measured by the God Image Scales (GIS) and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability (SAI-I) and Awareness (SAI-A) Subscales compared to participants in the comparable group and the wait list control group.

Hypothesis C

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report more positive patterns of religious coping as measured by the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Hypothesis D

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report an increase in the love of God, others, and self as measured by the Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey (TSOS) compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Participants

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants were solicited from the Free Will Baptist Bible College (FWBBC) student community. Particularly, chapel services, campus wide e-mails, and personal communication with students who met the inclusion criteria were utilized to promote the study. It was presented to the FWBBC student population as an optional group process designed to help people compare and contrast their emotional and theological ideas of God. It was emphasized that there are no “correct” answers to the survey questions; rather, the project is to get a sense of their genuine experience.

The FWBBC student body was given the opportunity to take the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Appendix D) at the conclusion of a weekly chapel service. Individuals present were given the opportunity to opt out. Students who revealed problems related to his or her emotional experience of God on the AGI were specifically targeted as potential participants and were given a screening interview if they endorsed interest on the survey. This interview consisted of an informed consent procedure (Appendixes A and C) and an inclusion criteria interview (guided by Appendix B) to determine whether he or she was appropriate for group therapy aimed at improving God image and attachment to God.

The inclusion criterion was as follows: (a) between the ages of 18 and 29; (b) enrolled as an undergraduate college student at FWBBC; (c) not currently a FWBBC Spiritual Life Leader; and (d) self-reported to be within the Christian tradition. Exclusion criteria included: (a) presence of significant psychological distress or pathology; this information came from the Client Demographic Form (Appendix B) and the screening interview; and (b) limited capacity for insight that is needed for this type of treatment. The screening interview assisted in making this determination.

Of the 96 students who completed the AGI, 36 were identified as eligible participants. Thirty-four students were administered the God Image Scales (GIS; Lawrence, 1997; Appendix E), The Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness Subscales (SAI-I and SAI-A; Hall & Edwards, 2002; Appendix F), the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pargament Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; Appendix G), the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey (TSOS; Richards et al., 2005; Appendix H), and the Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale Personal Form (IPS; Pargament et al., 1987; Appendix I), in addition to the AGI data. Thirty students completed the group process and post tests.

Thirty participants completed the nine-week study. Eleven participants were in the treatment group and completed the Discovering God manualized group treatment protocol. One participant dropped out of the treatment group. Ten participants were in the comparable group and completed the Spiritual Life Group manualized group treatment protocol. Two participants dropped out of the comparable group. Nine participants were a part of the wait list control group and completed the pre-tests and

post-tests. Three participants dropped out of the wait list control group. This study originally secured 36 participants. The dropout rate overall for this study was 16.6%. Attrition resulted from general life issues that arose in the life of some participants resulting in a decision to not complete the study.

Setting

This study was conducted at Free Will Baptist Bible College (FWBBC) in Nashville, Tennessee. It was founded in 1942 as a Bible college for Free Will Baptist students. At the present time, the majority of students are from Free Will Baptist churches pursuing undergraduate degrees in ministry (pastoral training, youth ministry, Christian education, and missions) and non-ministry programs (teacher education, psychology, business, pre-nursing, history, music, and English). Every student, regardless of degree program, is required to give personal testimony and accompanying references attesting to personal Christian faith and pursues a Bible major. The 2010-2011 student body was comprised of 283 students from fourteen states and five foreign countries. The school presents itself to prospective and current students as a Christian community of faith and learning.

Design

The participants ($n = 30$) were randomly assigned to one of three groups—the treatment group ($n = 11$), the comparable group ($n = 10$), and the wait list control group ($n = 9$)—by a randomized block design procedure to ensure that each group had an

approximately equal pre-test mean. A randomized control group pretest-posttest design was used in this study.

The treatment group and comparable group met for nine 55-minute sessions. Absences from the group were strongly discouraged, but in the case of an absence, the group member met individually with one of the group leaders for an individual session that covered the content of the missed session. One person was absent from one session in the treatment group. Seven people were each absent from one session in the comparable group, and on average there was one person absent from the comparable group each week. The wait list control group met twice, primarily for assessment purposes. The first meeting was during week one of the other two groups. The second meeting was during week nine of the other two groups. The members of the comparable group and wait-list control group were given the option of participating in the treatment group protocol following the conclusion of this study.

Group members were given a debriefing form (Appendix J) at the conclusion of the group process. The same instruments were administered to the participants following the last group session, excluding the Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scales Personal Form (IPS).

Therapists

The individuals who served as co-leaders for the groups for this study are experienced in group therapy. One co-leader was a Licensed Clinical Pastoral Therapist in Tennessee, and the other co-leader was a doctoral student and primary researcher for

this study. The group leaders had adequate time to become appropriately skilled in the use of the group treatment manuals (Appendix K or Appendix M). Each gained further experience with these manuals by leading a pilot study comprised of local church volunteer participants. Throughout the duration of the study the group leaders met together for a weekly 20-minute debriefing session.

Treatment

Manuals that specify the procedures for each of the nine 55-minute group sessions were developed for the treatment group (Thomas, 2009) and the comparable group (Rasar, 2010). In general, both groups focused on relationship building among group members. The Discovering God manual (Appendix K) used by the treatment group is specifically geared toward God image and attachment to God in content and homework assignments. The group time included psychoeducational components and discussion. The Spiritual Life Group manual (Appendix M) used by the comparable group was meant to replicate the peer led group process in which all FWBCC students engage as a part of their FWBCC college experience called Spiritual Life Group. The only difference in the comparable group for this study is that it was led by two co-leaders, a licensed therapist and a doctoral student clinician.

The integrity of the treatments was evaluated through the audio taped sessions and the weekly debriefing sessions with the primary researcher. The primary researcher listened to the audio taped sessions each week. The sessions took place on the campus of FWBCC. The group leaders were experienced in leading groups. Adherence to the group

manuals was emphasized, but the leaders had some freedom and flexibility for personal style. This flexibility did not deviate beyond the scope of the manual and the study itself.

Measures

The instruments that were used in this study assess specific processes that are hypothesized to change. The instrumentation that was used to reflect these changes are the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Appendix D), the God Image Inventory (GII; Lawrence, 1997; Appendix E), The Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness Subscales (SAI-I and SAI-A; Hall & Edwards, 2002; Appendix F), the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pergament et al., 1998; Appendix G), the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey (TSOS; Richards et al., 2005; Appendix H), and the Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scales, Personal Form (IPS; Pergament et al., 1987; Appendix I). This study did not include assessments of the participants at different points in time following the post-test measures.

Beck and McDonald (2004; Appendix D) developed a scale to operationalize the attachment to God construct. Two Attachment to God Inventory subscales are Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety about Abandonment. Research has demonstrated good internal consistency for both of these subscales. The Chronbach's alphas were .86 for the Avoidance of Intimacy subscale and .87 for the Anxiety about Abandonment subscale (Cooper, Bruce, Harman, & Boccaccini, 2009). The AGI is a 28-item measure with items such as, "I worry a lot about my relationship with God" and "I am uncomfortable

allowing God to control every aspect of my life.” The items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with a response of 1 meaning *disagree strongly* and a 7 meaning *agree strongly*. Scale scores for each Avoidance of Intimacy and Anxiety about Abandonment can range from 14 to 98.

The God Image Scales (GIS; Lawrence, 1997; Appendix E) measure a person’s God image using six subscales, including Presence (Chronbach’s alpha, .95), Challenge (Chronbach’s alpha, .81), Acceptance (Chronbach’s alpha, .83), Benevolence (Chronbach’s alpha, .84), Influence (Chronbach’s alpha, .89), and Providence (Chronbach’s alpha, .89). The 72-item measure includes items such as, “I can talk to God on an intimate basis,” “God keeps asking me to try harder,” and “God loves me regardless.” Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale using the terms *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Scale scores for each of the GIS subscales can range from 12 to 48.

Hall and Edwards (2002) designed the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI; Appendix F) to assess awareness of God and quality of relationship with God. These dimensions of the SAI include five subscales (Awareness, Realistic Acceptance, Disappointment, Grandiosity, and Instability). For the purposes of this study, the Instability (SAI-I; Chronbach’s alpha, .84) and Awareness (SAI-A; Chronbach’s alpha, .95) subscales were selected to administer to the participants. The 9-item Instability subscale and the 19-item Awareness subscale are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with a response of 1 meaning *not at all true* and 5 meaning *very true*. Instability scale scores can range from 9 to 45. Items such as, “I am afraid that God will give up on me,” and “There

are times when I feel that God is punishing me,” are included in the Instability subscale. Awareness scale scores can range from 19 to 95. Items such as, “God’s presence feels very real to me,” and “I have a sense of the direction in which God is guiding me,” are included in the Awareness subscale.

The Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pergament et al., 1998; Appendix G) is a 14-item measure that assesses positive and negative patterns of religious coping methods. The positive pattern is an expression of a sense of spirituality, a secure relationship with God, the belief that there is meaning in life, and spiritual connectedness with others. The negative pattern is a less secure relationship with God, an ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle in the search for significance. In the instructions for this scale the respondent is asked to think of a recent struggle in his or her life and to identify how much the items were used in coping. Items such as, “I looked for a stronger connection with God,” and “I questioned God’s love for me,” are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with a response of 0 meaning *not at all* and 3 meaning *a great deal*. Validity for the scale has proved to be good, with unique variance accounted for by each subscale. The Cronbach’s alphas were .87 and .78 for the positive pattern and negative pattern, respectively. Scores for each of these scales can range from 0 to 21.

The Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey (TSOS; Richards et al., 2005; Appendix H) is a 17-item measure with items such as, “I felt God’s love,” “I felt forgiveness towards others,” and “I loved myself,” that assesses spiritual outcomes of psychotherapy from a theistic spiritual perspective. Three TSOS subscales are Love of God (Cronbach’s alpha, .93), Love of Others (Cronbach’s alpha, .80), and Love of Self (Cronbach’s alpha,

.80). The individual is asked to read each item and answer how he or she felt in the past week. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with potential responses of *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, and *almost always*. Scores on the six item Love of God subscale can range from 6 to 30. Scores on the six item Love of Others subscale can also range from 6 to 30. Scores on the five item Love of Self subscale can range from 5 to 25.

The Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale (IPS; Pergament et al., 1987; Appendix I) was developed to measure religion expressed through personal channels (Pro-P). This scale was validated on church going students. It will be used as a covariate to control for a type of social desirability in this study. “Indiscriminate proreligiousness is operationally defined here as a positive response to religious material regardless of its plausibility” (Pergament et al., 1987, p. 185). When this orientation is present, it tends to interfere with the measurement of religious constructs. The Pro-P scale consists of 12 items (Cronbach’s alpha, .75). Items such as, “I am always inspired by the sermon topics,” and “Praying always brings me inner peace,” are included on the Pro-P scale. The items are rated as either true or false.

Quantitative Methodology

The measures given at both pretest and posttest were analyzed using Multiple Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA). This statistical analysis was selected because it tests the significance of mean group differences. A MANCOVA includes multiple dependent variables; hence, it is the best statistic for this study. Furthermore, this statistic provides a more holistic picture of the results. A MANCOVA assumes a random sample,

a normal distribution, the same covariate across the groups, and a linear relationship among all dependent variables. The use of a covariate assumes a linear relationship between the covariate and each dependent variable, the homogeneity of variance and covariance, and the homogeneity of the regressions. Each of these assumptions has been met in the current study. Random assignment of participants to groups guarded against threats to internal validity.

The independent variable was participation in a manualized group treatment protocol. There were three levels of the independent variable—the treatment group, the comparable group, and the wait list control group. The dependent variables were God image, God attachment, religious coping, and love of God, others, and self. The covariates were the pretest scores and indiscriminate proreligiousness.

The results of the between-groups MANCOVA address the following: elimination of data, analysis of test results of the interaction between the independent variable levels and the covariate, the effects of each independent variable on the combined dependent variable, univariate ANCOVA results of the effect for each independent variable level and dependent variable, univariate ANCOVA results of the comparison of means across groups, and post hoc results. SPSS was the statistical analysis program used in this study.

Several steps were taken to ensure accuracy of data collection, data entry, statistical analysis, and reporting results including consulting frequently with a qualified statistician and several layers of data checking by the primary researcher and colleagues.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1

Does a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God result in more positive God images and more secure attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college? Two hypotheses emerged from Research Question 1.

Null Hypothesis A

There will not be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God. Participants in the treatment group will not report a more secure and less avoidant and/or anxious attachment to God as measured by significantly lower scores on the AGI compared to participants in the comparable group and wait list control group.

Alternate Hypothesis A

There will be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God. Participants in the treatment group will report a more secure and less avoidant and/or anxious attachment to God as

measured by significantly lower scores on the AGI compared to participants in the comparable group and control group.

Null Hypothesis B

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God, participants in the treatment group will not report more positive God images as measured by the God Images Scales (GIS) and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness Subscales (SAI-I and SAI-A, respectively) compared to participants in the comparable group and control group.

Alternate Hypothesis B

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God, participants in the treatment group will report more positive God images as measured by the GIS, SAI-I, and SAI-A compared to participants in the comparable group and control group.

Research Question 2

Does a manualized group treatment result in more positive patterns of religious coping and an increase in love of God, others, and self in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college? Two hypotheses emerged from Research Question 2.

Null Hypothesis C

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will not report more positive patterns of religious coping as measured by the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE) compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Alternate Hypothesis C

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report more positive patterns of religious coping as measured by the Brief RCOPE compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Null Hypothesis D

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will not report an increase in love of God, others, and self as measured by the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey (TSOS) compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Alternate Hypothesis D

Following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report an increase in love of God, others,

and self as measured by the TSOS compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college.

The participants ($n = 30$) were randomly assigned to three groups; a treatment group ($n = 11$), a comparable group ($n = 10$), and a wait list control group ($n = 9$). A data integrity check was completed for each participant by a colleague of the primary researcher. The participants had a mean age of 20 years and a mean education level of college sophomore. Twelve participants were male and 18 were female. Ninety-seven percent of the participants were single. Eighty-seven percent of the participants had an annual income ranging from \$0 to \$10,000. Ninety-three percent of the participants were White/Caucasian.

The normality of the sample was checked via histograms, Shapiro-Wilks tests of normality, and skewness and kurtosis statistics for each group and for the sample as a whole. Even with a relatively small sample size ($n = 30$), most of the dependent variables were normal ($p > .05$). Out of the 32 subscales completed by the participants, the few that were not normal were within appropriate skewness ($+/- 2$) and kurtosis ($+/- 3$) parameters. One subscale completed by the treatment group (AGI_Avd1) breached

normality ($p < .001$). Four subscales completed by the comparable group violated normality (AGI_Anx1, $p = .021$; AGI_Avd1, $p = .040$; GIS_I1, $p = .042$; and RCOPE_N2, $p = .017$). Nine subscales completed by the wait list control group breached normality (AGI_Avd2, $p = .039$; GIS_A1, $p = .005$; GIS_Ps2, $p = .026$; GIS_A2, $p = .038$; SAI_A2, $p = .028$; RCOPE_P1, $p = .003$; RCOPE_N1, $p = .005$; TSOS_S1, $p = .011$; TSOS_G2, $p = .004$). MANCOVA and ANCOVA are both robust statistics to manage these minor violations of normality.

The covariate assumptions were checked for group interactions. The linear relationship between the covariate and each dependent variable was tested with a paired samples correlation ($p < .05$). The homogeneity of variance and covariance was tested using Box's M and Levene's Test ($p > .05$). The homogeneity of the regressions was checked by including the interactions between the covariates and each independent variable in SPSS, which resulted in no significant interaction effects.

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for each group for the pre-tests and post-tests for each subscale of each measure used in the study. Table 2 is a correlation matrix of pretest variables, and also includes the age of the participants. The correlation matrix provides justification for between-groups MANCOVA use.

Table 1

Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Measure	Group	<i>n</i>	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
AGI_Anxiety						
	Treatment	11	60.20	8.69	62.58	7.94
	Comparable	10	60.20	14.14	55.44	14.7
	WLC	9	59.64	11.44	60.76	15.68
AGI_Avoidance						
	Treatment	11	43.40	13.72	47.04	12.49
	Comparable	10	46.34	14.7	38.22	11.33
	WLC	9	49.14	7.126	51.24	13.54
GIS_Presence						
	Treatment	11	27.48	4.63	25.56	4.03
	Comparable	10	23.64	6.65	20.16	5.06
	WLC	9	23.64	6.95	25.32	7.07
GIS_Challenge						
	Treatment	11	21.84	3.66	20.28	2.80
	Comparable	10	20.16	3.84	17.52	2.27
	WLC	9	20.04	3.47	20.88	4.93
GIS_Acceptance						
	Treatment	11	25.68	4.68	24.60	4.72
	Comparable	10	22.20	4.80	18.84	3.67
	WLC	9	20.76	5.88	23.40	7.06
GIS_Benevolence						
	Treatment	11	21.24	3.60	20.76	3.12
	Comparable	10	18.96	3.11	17.64	2.64
	WLC	9	21.00	4.30	21.84	6.24
GIS_Influence						
	Treatment	11	27.60	4.48	26.76	3.34
	Comparable	10	25.20	4.42	23.04	3.97
	WLC	9	26.88	5.66	26.88	6.86

Table 1 continued

Measure	Group	<i>n</i>	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
GIS_Providence						
	Treatment	11	29.88	2.95	28.56	3.47
	Comparable	10	27.24	5.30	24.96	2.88
	WLC	9	29.04	4.25	27.84	5.64
SAI_Instability						
	Treatment	11	26.91	5.98	26.82	6.05
	Comparable	10	25.20	5.94	25.38	6.55
	WLC	9	25.92	5.99	25.56	7.59
SAI_Awareness						
	Treatment	11	54.53	15.03	61.75	12.98
	Comparable	10	63.65	14.57	76.00	14.23
	WLC	9	63.27	14.40	60.80	18.94
RCOPE_Positive						
	Treatment	11	13.02	3.55	15.19	2.28
	Comparable	10	12.39	2.51	16.17	2.86
	WLC	9	15.54	4.28	15.68	1.50
RCOPE_Negative						
	Treatment	11	6.30	4.40	6.09	5.01
	Comparable	10	5.88	4.26	6.23	3.70
	WLC	9	5.11	6.03	6.65	4.87
TSOS_Love of God						
	Treatment	11	17.70	3.10	21.00	2.61
	Comparable	10	20.82	5.99	25.50	4.33
	WLC	9	21.00	2.83	20.64	4.53
TSOS_Love of Others						
	Treatment	11	22.56	2.11	24.00	3.84
	Comparable	10	22.62	3.20	27.12	2.77
	WLC	9	22.02	3.35	23.22	3.38

Table 1 continued

Measure	Group	<i>n</i>	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
TSOS_Love of Self						
	Treatment	11	14.45	2.59	15.10	2.70
	Comparable	10	15.00	3.39	18.00	4.32
	WLC	9	18.55	2.07	14.90	3.79

Note: AGI = Attachment to God Inventory; GIS = God Image Scales; SAI = Spiritual Assessment Inventory; RCOPE = Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scales; TSOS = Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey. The score range for each 14 item AGI subscale was 14 to 98. The score range for each 12 item GIS subscale was 12 to 48. The score range for the 19 item SAI_Awareness subscale was 19 to 95. The score range for the 9 item SAI_Instability subscale was 9 to 45. The score range for each 7 item RCOPE subscale was zero to 21. The score range for the six item TSOS_Love of God and the six item TSOS_Love of Others subscales was 6 to 30. The score range for the five item TSOS_Love of Self subscale was 5 to 25.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Pretest Variables and Characteristics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age	-	-.051	.492*	.342	.417*	.022	.336	.328	.235	-.234	-.230	-.294	-.149	-.261	-.003	-.245	.152
2. AGI_AnX		-	.315	.266	-.090	.185	.124	.122	-.033	.397*	-.141	.128	.438*	.113	.122	-.113	-.259
3. AGI_Avd			-	.220	.071	-.155	.256	.061	.091	-.182	-.236	-.128	.096	-.116	-.059	-.285	-.136
4. GIS_Ps				-	.552*	.600*	.450*	.754*	.793*	.446*	-.838*	-.205	.283	-.630*	-.057	-.463*	.420*
5. GIS_C					-	.637*	.590*	.561*	.703*	-.062	-.442*	-.039	.084	-.280	.336	-.074	.187
6. GIS_A						-	.531*	.638*	.608*	.477*	-.502*	-.034	.510*	-.239	.394*	-.206	.243
7. GIS_B							-	.518*	.515*	.186	-.304	-.067	.181	-.207	.058	-.051	.184
8. GIS_I								-	.676*	.404*	-.574*	-.040	.245	-.442*	-.001	-.248	.376*
9. GIS_Pv									-	.348	-.651*	-.218	.259	-.624*	-.043	-.157	.432*
10. SAI_I										-	-.346	-.050	.573*	-.322	-.130	-.188	.234
11. SAI_A											-	.411*	-.011	.724*	.114	.544*	-.487*
12. RCOPE_P												-	.293	.499*	.380*	.533*	-.134
13. RCOPE_N													-	-.034	.233	-.106	-.014
14. TSOS_G														-	.497*	.631*	-.522*
15. TSOS_O															-	.277	-.230
16. TSOS_S																-	-.105
17. IPS																	-

Note. Correlations with an * are significant at $\alpha = .05$

Research Question 1

The first research question was as follows: Does a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God result in more positive God images and more secure attachment to God in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college? Two hypotheses emerged from Research Question 1.

Hypothesis A

Hypothesis A stated that there will be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God. Participants in the treatment group will report a more secure and less avoidant and/or anxious attachment to God as measured by significantly lower scores on the AGI compared to participants in the comparable group and control group.

Hypothesis A was not supported. The MANCOVA results did not indicate a significant decrease in avoidant attachment to God ($p = .109$) or anxious attachment to God ($p = .714$) as measured by the AGI in the treatment group. However, the AGI Avoidance Subscale showed a strong effect size (Partial Eta Squared = .168). Table 3 displays MANCOVA descriptive statistics for Hypothesis A. Table 4 displays ANCOVA results of mean group differences for Hypothesis A.

Table 3

Hypothesis A: MANCOVA Results

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
AGI_Anxiety_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	.342	.714	.028
	Treatment	11	4.230				
	Comparable	10	4.137				
	WLC	9	4.431				
AGI_Avoidance_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	2.429	.109	.168
	Treatment	11	3.363				
	Comparable	10	2.825				
	WLC	9	3.544				

Note: Wilks' Lambda Significance for Hypothesis A = .326

AGI = Attachment to God Inventory

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:

AGI_Anxiety_Pre = 4.2881

AGI_Avoidance_Pre = 3.2952

Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale (IPS) = 17.9000

Mean score equals the item mean average for each group.

Table 4

Hypothesis A: ANCOVA Results

Dependent Variable	Participant's Group Assignment (I)	Participant's Group Assignment (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i> □
AGI_Anxiety_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.093	.993
		Wait List	-.201	.932
	Comparable	Treatment	-.093	.993
		Wait List	-.294	.812
	WLC	Treatment	.201	.932
		Comparable	.294	.812
AGI_Avoidance_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.538	.349
		Wait List	-.182	.937
	Comparable	Treatment	-.538	.349
		Wait List	-.719	.125
	WLC	Treatment	.182	.937
		Comparable	.719	.125

Note: AGI= Attachment to God Inventory

Based on estimated marginal means.

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

Hypothesis B

Hypothesis B stated that following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God, participants in the treatment group will report more positive God images as measured by the God Image Scales (GIS), Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness subscales (SAI-I and SAI-A, respectively) compared to participants in the comparable group and control group.

Hypothesis B was not supported in its entirety. The MANCOVA results did not indicate significantly more positive God images as measured by the combined GIS, SAI-I, and SAI-A scales in the treatment group ($p = .168$). However, the results of a univariate ANCOVA indicated significantly more positive God images for three of the subscales in the comparable group compared to the wait list control group: God's presence ($p = .018$), God's influence ($p = .039$), and awareness of God ($p = .002$). The results of a univariate ANCOVA also indicated a significantly more positive awareness of God ($p = .030$) in the treatment group compared to the wait list control group. Table 5 displays MANCOVA descriptive statistics for Hypothesis B. Table 6 displays ANCOVA results of mean group differences for Hypothesis B.

Table 5

Hypothesis B: MANCOVA Results

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
GIS_Presence_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	4.844	.021	.350
	Treatment	11	1.931				
	Comparable	10	1.756				
	WLC	9	2.263				
GIS_Challenge_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	2.596	.102	.224
	Treatment	11	1.598				
	Comparable	10	1.483				
	WLC	9	1.825				
GIS_Acceptance_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	3.259	.062	.266
	Treatment	11	1.903				
	Comparable	10	1.614				
	WLC	9	2.086				
GIS_Benevolence_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	2.251	.134	.200
	Treatment	11	1.617				
	Comparable	10	1.528				
	WLC	9	1.891				
GIS_Influence_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	3.794	.042	.297
	Treatment	11	2.077				
	Comparable	10	1.946				
	WLC	9	2.401				
GIS_Providence_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	1.476	.255	.141
	Treatment	11	2.246				
	Comparable	10	2.164				
	WLC	9	2.388				

Table 5 continued

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
SAI_Instability_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	.114	.893	.012
	Treatment	11	2.905				
	Comparable	10	2.797				
	WLC	9	2.959				
SAI_Awareness_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	8.228	.003	.478
	Treatment	11	3.636				
	Comparable	10	3.883				
	WLC	9	2.856				

Note:

Wilks' Lambda Significance for Hypothesis B = .168

GIS = God Image Scales

SAI = Spiritual Assessment Inventory

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:

GIS_Presence_Pre = 2.0861

GIS_Challenge_Pre = 1.7250

GIS_Acceptance_Pre = 1.9222

GIS_Benevolence_Pre = 1.6972

GIS_Influence_Pre = 2.2167

GIS_Providence_Pre = 2.3944

SAI_Instability_Pre = 2.8926

SAI_Awareness_Pre = 3.1684

Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale (IPS) = 17.9000

Mean score equals the item mean average for each group.

Table 6

Hypothesis B: ANVOCA Results (n = 30)

Dependent Variable	Participant's Group Assignment (I)	Participant's Group Assignment (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i> □
GIS_Presence_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.175	.573
		Wait List	-.333	.200
	Comparable	Treatment	-.175	.573
		Wait List	-.508*	.018
Wait List	Treatment	.333	.200	
	Comparable	.508*	.018	
GIS_Challenge_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.115	.790
		Wait List	-.228	.433
	Comparable	Treatment	-.115	.790
		Wait List	-.343	.102
Wait List	Treatment	.228	.433	
	Comparable	.343	.102	
GIS_Acceptance_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.289	.309
		Wait List	-.183	.773
	Comparable	Treatment	-.289	.309
		Wait List	-.472	.077
Wait List	Treatment	.183	.773	
	Comparable	.472	.077	
GIS_Benevolence_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.089	.921
		Wait List	-.273	.392
	Comparable	Treatment	-.089	.921
		Wait List	-.363	.140
Wait List	Treatment	.273	.392	
	Comparable	.363	.140	
GIS_Influence_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.132	.770
		Wait List	-.324	.229
	Comparable	Treatment	-.132	.770
		Wait List	-.456*	.039
Wait List	Treatment	.324	.229	
	Comparable	.456*	.039	

Table 6 continued

Dependent Variable	Participant's Group Assignment (I)	Participant's Group Assignment (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i> □
GIS_Providence_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.082	.871
		Wait List	-.143	.685
	Comparable	Treatment	-.082	.871
		Wait List	-.225	.279
	Wait List	Treatment	.143	.685
		Comparable	.225	.279
SAI_Instability_Post	Treatment	Comparable	.107	.984
		Wait List	-.054	.999
	Comparable	Treatment	-.107	.984
		Wait List	-.162	.962
	Wait List	Treatment	.054	.999
		Comparable	.162	.962
SAI_Awareness_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.247	.648
		Wait List	.780*	.030
	Comparable	Treatment	.247	.648
		Wait List	1.026*	.002
	Wait List	Treatment	-.780*	.030
		Comparable	-1.026*	.002

Note: GIS = God Image Scales

SAI = Spiritual Assessment Inventory

Based on estimated marginal means.

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: Does a manualized group treatment result in more positive patterns of religious coping and an increase in love of God, others, and self in a sample of undergraduate college students attending a conservative Christian college? Two hypotheses emerged from Research Question 2.

Hypothesis C

Hypothesis C stated that following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report more positive patterns of religious coping as measured by the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Hypothesis C was not supported. The MANCOVA results did not indicate a significant difference in positive patterns of religious coping as measured by the Brief RCOPE ($p = .735$). Table 7 displays MANCOVA descriptive statistics for Hypothesis C. Table 8 displays ANCOVA results of mean group differences for Hypothesis C.

Table 7

Hypothesis C: MANCOVA Results

Variable	Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
RCOPE_Positive_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	.875	.430	.068
	Treatment	11	2.194				
	Comparable	10	2.358				
	WLC	9	2.159				
RCOPE_Negative_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	.146	.865	.012
	Treatment	11	.816				
	Comparable	10	.930				
	WLC	9	.969				

Note: Wilks' Lambda Significance for Hypothesis C = .735

RCOPE = Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:

RCOPE_Positive_Pre = 1.9381

RCOPE_Negative_Pre = .8286

Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale (IPS) = 17.900

Mean score equals the item mean average for each group.

Table 8

Hypothesis C: ANCOVA Results

Dependent Variable	Participant's Group Assignment (I)	Participant's Group Assignment (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i> □
RCOPE_Positive_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.163	.651
		Wait List	.036	.994
	Comparable	Treatment	.163	.651
		Wait List	.199	.553
	WLC	Treatment	-.036	.994
		Comparable	-.199	.553
RCOPE_Negative_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.113	.974
		Wait List	-.153	.943
	Comparable	Treatment	.113	.974
		Wait List	-.039	.999
	WLC	Treatment	.153	.943
		Comparable	.039	.999

Note: RCOPE = Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale

Based on estimated marginal means.

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

Hypothesis D

Hypothesis D stated that following participation in a manualized group treatment protocol, participants in the treatment group and comparable group will report an increase in love of God, others, and self as measure by the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey compared to the participants in the wait list control group.

Hypothesis D was supported. The MANVOCA results indicated a significant increase in love of God, others, and self as measured by the TSOS ($p = .046$). Furthermore, significance was also indicated for each of the TSOS subscales: Love of God ($p = .009$), Love of Others ($p = .031$), and Love of Self ($p = .005$). Table 9 displays MANCOVA descriptive statistics for Hypothesis D. Table 10 displays ANCOVA results of mean group differences for Hypothesis D and indicates the significant subscale difference is between the comparable group and wait list control group on the Love of God subscale ($p = .008$) and Love of Self subscale ($p = .005$).

Table 9

Hypothesis D: MANCOVA Results

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
TSOS_Love of God_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	5.743	.009	.333
	Treatment	11	3.749				
	Comparable	10	4.237				
	WLC	9	3.154				
TSOS_Love of Others_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	4.044	.031	.260
	Treatment	11	3.962				
	Comparable	10	4.556				
	WLC	9	3.874				
TSOS_Love of Self_Post	Total Sample	30	-	2	6.700	.005	.368
	Treatment	11	3.128				
	Comparable	10	3.843				
	WLC	9	2.574				

Note: Wilks' Lambda Significance for Hypothesis D = .046

TSOS = Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values:

TSOS_God_Pre = 3.2889

TSOS_Others_Pre = 3.7333

TSOS_Self_Pre = 3.1733

Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale (IPS) = 17.900

Mean score equals the item mean average for each group.

Table 10

Hypothesis D: Mean Group Differences (n = 30)

Dependent Variable	Participant's Group Assignment (I)	Participant's Group Assignment (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	p □
TSOS_God_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.488	.251
		Wait List	.596	.232
	Comparable	Treatment	.488	.251
		Wait List	1.084*	.008
	Wait List	Treatment	-.596	.232
		Comparable	-1.084*	.008
TSOS_Others_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.595	.073
		Wait List	.088	.988
	Comparable	Treatment	.595	.073
		Wait List	.683	.078
	Wait List	Treatment	-.088	.988
		Comparable	-.683	.078
TSOS_Self_Post	Treatment	Comparable	-.715	.088
		Wait List	.554	.377
	Comparable	Treatment	.715	.088
		Wait List	1.269*	.005
	Wait List	Treatment	-.554	.377
		Comparable	-.1269*	.005

Note: TSOS = Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey

Based on estimated marginal means

a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Sidak.

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Summary

Of the four hypotheses identified in this study, Hypothesis D was supported, indicating that those who participated in the treatment group and comparable group experienced an overall significant increase in love of God, others, and self compared to the wait list control group. Hypotheses A, B, and C were not supported; however, there were some effects in Hypotheses A and B. In Hypothesis B, the mean group differences indicated a significant increase in three God images; God's presence, God's influence, and awareness of God; by the participants of the comparable group, and an increase in awareness of God by the treatment group.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The first hypothesis in this study was that there would be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Attachment to God Inventory. Specifically, it was hypothesized that participants in the treatment group would report a significantly more secure and less avoidant and/or anxious attachment to God as measured by significantly lower scores on the AGI compared to participants in the comparable group and the wait list control group. This hypothesis was not supported, indicating that the treatment group did not experience significantly decreased avoidance in their attachment to God and significantly decreased anxiety in their attachment to God.

The second hypothesis in this study was that there would be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the God Image Scales and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness Subscales. In particular, it was hypothesized that the participants in the treatment group would report more positive God images compared to the participants in the comparable group and wait list control group. This hypothesis was not supported, indicating that the treatment group did not report more positive God images. However, statistical analyses indicated significantly more positive God images for three of the subscales: God's presence, God's influence, and awareness of God in the participants of the comparable group compared to the wait list

control group, and a significant increase in the awareness of God in the participants of the treatment group compared to the wait list control group.

The third hypothesis in this study was that there would be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale. Specifically, it was hypothesized that the participants in the treatment group and comparable group would report more positive patterns of religious coping compared to the participants in the wait list control group. This hypothesis was not supported, indicating that participating in the manualized group treatment protocols did not result in more positive patterns of religious coping among the group members.

The fourth hypothesis in this study was that there would be a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores on the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey. In particular, it was hypothesized that the participants in the treatment group and comparable group would report an increase in the love of God, love of others, and love of self compared to the participants in the wait list control group. This hypothesis was supported, indicating that participating in the treatment group and comparable group protocols did result in an increase in the love of God, love of others, and love of self.

Conclusions

The two fold focus of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a manualized group treatment protocol and to obtain support for changing God image, attachment to God, religious coping, and love of God, others, and self. The major finding concerns no significant change in God image for participants in a treatment protocol

designed to facilitate such change. This study also found, however, that an increase in love of God, others, and self as measured by the TSOS can result from a group treatment protocol experience.

The results are not congruent with Thomas's (2009) study. Although both studies incorporated the same treatment manual entitled *Discovering God*, the current study included the addition of a comparable group and a wait list control group. Whereas Thomas' study included some participants that were simultaneously engaged in individual therapy and the group treatment, this study excluded potential participants that were currently in individual therapy. Furthermore, this study utilized multiple quantitative measures, as opposed to Thomas' study, which utilized only the Attachment to God Inventory. Attempts were made in this study to control for threats to internal validity and to employ multiple psychometrically evaluated measures. Such attempts may have contributed to the non harmonious results.

This study provides mixed support for Rizzuto's (1974) theoretical underpinnings that God image change is achievable. The treatment group resulted in one God image change, awareness of God. But, the comparable group resulted in God image change as indicated by the significant increase of three God images, the presence, awareness, and influence of God. Therefore, God image seems to be changeable, but the mechanism of change in this study is unknown. Also, the current knowledge base that, in general, group therapy is efficacious (Barlow et al., 2000) was supported by the results of this study as indicated by good spiritual outcomes.

Implications for Practice

While the results of this study help to empirically clarify theoretical questions regarding God image and attachment to God, a number of implications for practice can be drawn from the results as well. This study provided implications for the practice of manualized group treatment protocols in general. The context of a group can offer helpful support to individuals, and the interaction among the group members brings about a dynamic that is not achievable in individual counseling. In this study the content of each group protocol was unique, but they both led to significant change, as measured by the TSOS. This suggests that the common group elements led to the results, as opposed to differences in the group protocols. Furthermore, the addition of a manualized protocol to group process brings about consistent treatment.

Another implication for practice gleaned from this study is the emphasis on experience of God versus concept of God. Exploring one's God images and attachment to God can be enhanced through a group process as indicated by consistent attendance and candid remarks made by several participants in this study. It would be helpful for therapists to be aware of the ways in which God image, attachment to God, and God concept differ in development and manifestation in the life of an individual. A group therapy process may help an individual grow spiritually, and the guidance of therapists themselves and the influence of fellow group members may affect change in someone's relationship with God.

Implications for Research

Both the findings and the limitations of this study provide direction for future research in the area of God image and attachment to God treatment and change. Of particular interest is the significant increase in the love of God, others, and self among the participants in two of the groups, the treatment group and comparable group, in contrast to the wait list control group participants. This finding suggests that a manualized group treatment protocol on God image and attachment to God and/or a manualized group treatment protocol utilizing a more general Christian based approach like a Bible study, as completed by the comparable group, has influence and allows the participants to experience God in a more positive way, as well as positively influence relationships with other people and the self. Essentially, this study suggests common core elements in a spiritually focused group can lead to positive spiritual outcomes. Moreover, the value of small groups in the Christian college and Christian university environments is evidenced in this study because the participants of the wait list control group did not change in their God image, attachment to God, religious coping, or theistic spiritual outcomes. A positive impact occurred in the spiritual health of the treatment group and comparable group participants. Future research using the treatment group manual and replicating the comparable group would strengthen the understanding of the impact of group treatment on God image and attachment to God treatment and change.

Since the results of this study contradict Thomas' study (2009), perhaps God image and attachment to God change may be harder to change than has been hypothesized. Group protocols desiring to produce God image and attachment to God

change may need to be revised. In this study, the first half of the treatment group sessions was primarily experiential, and the second half utilized several rational emotive interventions. It was noted via informal observation that group member engagement changed when the treatment group manual shifted away from the experiential components. Furthermore, the comparable group was primarily experiential throughout the duration of the group process. Participants may benefit from expanding certain experiential exercises and incorporating more object relations interventions.

For example, part of session four for the treatment group included an exercise in which the participants were asked to visualize a time in their lives that involved regret, and that same week a homework exercise invited the participants to write a journal entry in which they wrote a letter to themselves from God. Time did not allow to spend much time in group discussion on these activities, but group members indicated they would have benefited from emphasizing this part of the group process to fill an entire session.

In addition, an emphasis on comparing and contrasting the group members families of origin and their experiences of their parents may benefit participants. The treatment group manual used in this study included a family of origin component, but time did not allow to spend much time in group discussion on this topic. Perhaps identifying and processing common family of origin experiences in depth in the context of the group would have affected the outcomes of future studies using a revised *Discovering God* manual.

The participants in the current study differed in meaningful ways from the participants in the Thomas (2009) study. For example, the average age in the Thomas

study was 29.6 and the average age in this study was 20. Perhaps the treatment group manual might be better suited for an adult population that is not in the college or university setting. One example for this implication relates to bibliotherapy. The reading of C.S. Lewis' book *The Horse and His Boy* that was a part of the treatment group did not seem to have the same impact on the participants in this study as it did on the participants in Thomas' study. Assigned reading may be associated with academic course work to the college student population as opposed to a therapeutic intervention, which was the intent of the bibliotherapy activity in the group.

Participants may benefit from the incorporation of contemplative prayer, other spiritual formation exercises, inner healing prayer, more accountability to ensure homework completion, and longer group sessions to process the new information. Also, future studies that research the efficacy of short term groups compared to long term groups or long term individual therapy would help answer questions about God image and attachment to God treatment and change.

There were some notable limitations in this study that should be considered in future research. First, the sample size was quite small ($n = 30$) and included only college students attending a Christian college. Future research with larger samples, greater diversity, and beyond the context of a Christian college would help add to the knowledge base on God image and attachment to God treatment and change. Secondly, the lack of empirical data suggesting significant God image, attachment to God, and religious coping effects in this study carries implications for future research. Further refinement of the treatment manuals may add clarity to these areas of study.

Recommendations

The scope of this study was intentionally limited to the Bible college context and the non-clinical population. Discovering the impact of manualized treatment groups, emphasizing God image and attachment to God, beyond the scope of this study would add to the body of literature on God image and attachment to God treatment and change. Identifying and utilizing other instruments that measure God image and attachment to God could also be considered in future research.

Also, a longitudinal component in a future research study would provide further insight into the nature of God image and attachment to God treatment and change. It is theoretically reasonable that testing the effects of group treatment on God image and attachment to God over time would yield noteworthy results.

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APPENDIX A: Client Consent and Registration Forms

Welcome to the God Image/Spiritual Life Group provided by Free Will Baptist Bible College in conjunction with Liberty University. This form will provide information about the services, data collected through the group, and about your rights and responsibilities as a participant. Please be sure to discuss any questions with Jacqueline Rasar or the other group leader. If you have concerns you are not comfortable sharing with any of these, you may contact the Liberty Institutional Review Board with your concerns at irb@liberty.edu. Your signature at the bottom of this page indicates that you understand the information and freely consent to the group process.

The group leader, in addition to Ms. Rasar, is a licensed therapist affiliated with the Pastoral Counseling Centers of Tennessee, Inc. Both group leaders are psychologists with expertise in many specialties, such as families, spiritual issues, and trauma. It is understood that the group leaders operate under the regulating authorities of the state of Tennessee.

Treatment

The practitioners of the God Image/Spiritual Life Groups will use explicitly Christian techniques that are designed to help you compare and contrast your emotional and theological ideas of God. Minimal research has been conducted on techniques that explicitly address the God Image in group treatment. Therefore, as a participant in this group, you should know that the techniques used are not as robust or as proven as traditional techniques that are regularly used to address depression, anxiety, or any other major psychological difficulty.

It is important to realize that although there are many potential benefits from these treatment activities, there are also some risks. In psychotherapy, for example, it is not uncommon to experience feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, or guilt. These feelings may be natural and normal and are an important part of the therapy process, but they may also be unexpected and confusing. Although there are no guarantees, when therapy is effective there is a reduction in feelings of distress and a positive experience of problems being

improved or resolved. You are encouraged to discuss with your group leader any feelings or concerns that arise during your treatment. They will help you obtain additional supportive resources (such as mental health referral) if needed.

Assessment

The assessments consist of the Attachment to God Inventory, the God Image Scales, two Spiritual Assessment Inventory subscales, the Brief Measure of Religious Coping Scale, the Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Scale, and the Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale. These assessments will be given in the beginning of the group and at the completion of the group, except the Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale will only be given at the beginning.

Confidentiality

In order to ensure the best possible service, the group leaders will discuss the group therapy sessions as well as data collected with the primary researcher, Jacqueline Rasar. Any conversations you have within the group sessions are confidential and will not be revealed to outside parties without your permission. Data collected through assessment will also remain confidential. Any information regarding the data collected that is shared by the client to the group is confidential and the group leaders will not reveal the information to outside parties without your permission. But, due to the nature of the group, Free Will Baptist Bible College and Liberty University cannot guarantee the other group members will keep the information confidential. The only other exceptions to this policy are rare situations in which the law requires the release of information with or without your permission. These are as follows: 1) if there is evidence of physical and/or sexual abuse of children, or abuse to the elderly; 2) if we judge that you are in danger of harming yourself or another individual; 3) if the court subpoenas your records; or 4) if licensure laws require reporting therapist misconduct. In the rare event of any of these situations, where permissible we would attempt to speak with you about our intentions before any action is taken, but if we are unable to reach you, we may give out the information without your prior knowledge. If you have any questions or concerns about this, please feel free to discuss them with your group leader.

Emergencies

Our services are not equipped to assist you in emergencies, thus it is imperative that you seek assistance from the Free Will Baptist Bible College Student Wellness Program by calling (615) 844-5080 or a local hospital emergency room. The crisis hotline is also a resource in case of emergency. The phone number is (615) 244-7444.

Payment Policy and Compensation

Participating in the God Image or Spiritual Life Group is free of charge. The requirement at Free Will Baptist Bible College to attend Spiritual Life Group throughout the week and Chapel on Wednesdays is waived for the duration of the God Image/Spiritual Life Group as long as you attend each session. We reserve the right to cancel or suspend services in the event of non-compliance.

Agreement

I have read the above material, and I fully understand my rights and obligations.

Printed Name of Student

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B: Demographic Form

Name : _____ Today's Date: _____
(Last) (First) (M Initial)

Address: _____
(PO Box or Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Telephone: _____
(Home/Cell)

Date of Birth: ____/____/____ Age: _____

Sex: M _____ F _____

Marital Status:

Single _____

Married _____

Divorced _____

Widowed _____

Place of Employment: _____

Income Level: _____ \$0-\$10,000 _____ \$11,000-\$15,000 _____ \$16,000-\$19,000

_____ \$20,000-\$25,000 _____ \$26,000 & Above (Annual Funds in US Dollars)

Race:

African American _____

Asian _____

Latino _____

Native American _____

White _____

Other _____

Education Level:

Freshman _____

Sophomore _____

Junior _____

Senior _____

Medical Insurance Coverage: Yes ____ No ____

Outpatient Therapist: _____ Phone: _____

In Case of Emergency Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Relationship: _____

How often do you attend chapel on Wednesday?

Frequently _____ Sometimes _____ Rarely _____

How often do you attend chapel on Friday?

Frequently _____ Sometimes _____ Rarely _____

Are you currently a Spiritual Life Leader?

Yes _____

No _____

APPENDIX C: Research Consent Form

Title of Study: God Image Group: An efficacy study.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the research is to study how group therapy affects your God Image, or emotional experience of God, as measured by pre-group and post-group assessments, mentioned below.

Procedure to be followed in the study: You will be asked to complete five assessments after your screening interview. After that, you will be asked to participate in nine 55-minute sessions of the God Image/Spiritual Life Group. The sessions will be audio taped to assess the co-leaders maintenance and adherence to the manualized sessions. Following the closing of the 9th session, you will be asked to complete five assessments.

Participation requirements: Participants must be 18 years or older, a current student at Free Will Baptist Bible College, and within the Christian tradition.

Anonymity of participants and confidentiality of the results: The results of the study will be kept strictly confidential. The session content and results of the study will only be released to individuals working on the project.

Discomforts and risks from participation in the study: While participants in this research may benefit by participating in group therapy and receiving God Image intervention techniques, there are several risks that need to be taken into account. Group therapy can provide only limited confidentiality. Due to the personal nature of topics discussed during group therapy, anxiety or other negative affective states may result. If these symptoms do occur, then we will address them in the group therapy setting and/or potentially refer you to individual therapy and/or a medication consultation.

Expected benefits: Participants in this research will benefit by receiving support from group therapy in regards to God Image work.

Freedom to withdraw: You are free to withdraw from participation in the group at any time without penalty.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated monetarily.

Use of research data: The collection of results from this research may be used for scientific or educational purposes. The data may be presented at scientific meetings

and/or published and republished in professional journals or books, or used for any other purposes, which Free Will Baptist Bible College and Liberty University considers proper in the interest of education, knowledge, or research. In all instances, your individual identity will be protected.

Approval of research: This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University and Free Will Baptist Bible College. You may contact the Liberty IRB at irb@liberty.edu with any concerns.

Participant's Permission:

1. I have read and understand the above description of this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them all answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study.
2. I also understand that if I participate, I may withdraw at anytime without penalty.
3. I also understand that I must be 18 years or older in order to participate in this study.
4. I understand that I can receive a copy of the results by emailing Ms. Jacqueline Rasar at jrasar@fwbbc.edu or jdrasar@liberty.edu
5. I understand that should I have any questions about this research I should contact Ms. Jacqueline Rasar.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: The Attachment to God Inventory

The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with God. We are interested in how you generally experience your relationship with God, not just in what is happening in that relationship currently. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space provided, using the following rating scale:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Disagree Strongly Neutral/Mixed Agree Strongly

- _____ 1. I worry a lot about my relationship with God.
- _____ 2. I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God.
- _____ 3. If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset or angry.
- _____ 4. I am totally dependent upon God for everything in my life. (R)
- _____ 5. I am jealous at how God seems to care more for others than for me.
- _____ 6. It is uncommon for me to cry when sharing with God.
- _____ 7. Sometimes I feel that God loves others more than me.
- _____ 8. My experiences with God are very intimate and emotional. (R)
- _____ 9. I am jealous at how close some people are to God.
- _____ 10. I prefer not to depend too much on God.
- _____ 11. I often worry about whether God is pleased with me.
- _____ 12. I am uncomfortable being emotional in my communication with God.
- _____ 13. Even if I fail, I never question that God is pleased with me. (R)
- _____ 14. My prayers to God are often matter-of-fact and not very personal.

- _____15. Almost daily I feel that my relationship with God goes back and forth from “hot” to “cold.”
- _____16. I am uncomfortable with emotional displays of affection to God.
- _____17. I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong.
- _____18. Without God I couldn’t function at all. (R)
- _____19. I often feel angry with God for not responding to me when I want.
- _____20. I believe people should not depend on God for things they should do for themselves.
- _____21. I crave reassurance from God that God loves me.
- _____22. Daily I discuss all of my problems and concerns with God. (R)
- _____23. I am jealous when others feel God’s presence when I cannot.
- _____24. I am uncomfortable allowing God to control every aspect of my life.
- _____25. I worry a lot about damaging my relationship with God.
- _____26. My prayers to God are very emotional. (R)
- _____27. I get upset when I feel God helps others, but forgets about me.
- _____28. I let God make most of the decisions in my life. (R)

Scoring:

Avoidance = sum of even numbered items

Anxiety – sum of odd numbered items

Items 4, 8, 13, 18, 22, 26, and 28 are reverse scored

Avoidance Score: _____

Anxiety Score: _____

APPENDIX E: God Image Scales

You are being asked to complete an instrument to help gain an understanding of your image of God. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know how you honestly feel. Your answers will be completely confidential. Please respond to each statement by circling the response that comes closest to describing your feeling:

SA, for Strongly Agree, if the statement is a particularly good way of describing how you feel about God.

A, for Agree, if the statement just adequately describes your feelings about God.

D, for Disagree, if the statement does not adequately describe your feelings about God.

SD, for Strongly Disagree, if the statement is a particularly bad way of describing your feelings about God.

When I obey God's rules, God makes good things happen for me.	SA	A	D	SD
I imagine God to be rather formal, almost standoffish. *	SA	A	D	SD
I am sometimes anxious about whether God still loves me. *	SA	A	D	SD
Asking God for help rarely does me any good. *	SA	A	D	SD
I am confident of God's love for me.	SA	A	D	SD
God does not answer when I call. *	SA	A	D	SD
I know I'm not perfect, but God loves me anyway.	SA	A	D	SD
The voice of God tells me what to do.	SA	A	D	SD
I have sometimes felt that I have committed the unforgiveable sin. *	SA	A	D	SD
Even when I mess up, I know God will straighten them out.	SA	A	D	SD
God never challenges me. *	SA	A	D	SD
Thinking too much could endanger my faith. *	SA	A	D	SD
I think of God as more compassionate than demanding.	SA	A	D	SD

I get what I pray for.	SA	A	D	SD
I can feel God deep inside of me.	SA	A	D	SD
God's love for me has no strings attached.	SA	A	D	SD
God doesn't feel very personal to me. *	SA	A	D	SD
No matter how hard I pray, it doesn't do me any good. *	SA	A	D	SD
Even when I do bad things, I know God still loves me.	SA	A	D	SD
I can talk to God on an intimate basis.	SA	A	D	SD
What happens in my life is largely a result of decisions I make. *	SA	A	D	SD
I think God even loves atheists.	SA	A	D	SD
God nurtures me.	SA	A	D	SD
I get no feeling of closeness to God, even in prayer. *	SA	A	D	SD
God loves me only when I perform perfectly. *	SA	A	D	SD
God loves me regardless.	SA	A	D	SD
God takes pleasure in my achievements.	SA	A	D	SD
I can't imagine anyone God couldn't love.	SA	A	D	SD
God keeps asking me to try harder.	SA	A	D	SD
God is always there for me.	SA	A	D	SD
I get no help from God even if I pray for it. *	SA	A	D	SD
Being close to God and being active in the world don't mix. *	SA	A	D	SD
God can easily be provoked by disobedience. *	SA	A	D	SD

I often worry about whether God can love me. *	SA	A	D	SD
God is in control of my life.	SA	A	D	SD
God want me to achieve all I can in life.	SA	A	D	SD
I am a very powerful person because of God.	SA	A	D	SD
God will always provide for me.	SA	A	D	SD
I think God mostly leaves people free. *	SA	A	D	SD
If God listens to prayers, you couldn't prove it by me. *	SA	A	D	SD
God is looking for a chance to get even with me. *	SA	A	D	SD
God's mercy is for everyone.	SA	A	D	SD
God's love for me is unconditional.	SA	A	D	SD
I know what to do to get God to listen to me.	SA	A	D	SD
God asks me to keep growing as a person.	SA	A	D	SD
I think God only loves certain people.*	SA	A	D	SD
God almost always answers my prayers.	SA	A	D	SD
God doesn't want me to ask too many questions. *	SA	A	D	SD
God does not do much to determine the outcome of my life. *	SA	A	D	SD
God lets the world run by its own laws. *	SA	A	D	SD
Even if my beliefs about God were wrong, God would still love me.	SA	A	D	SD
I am not good enough for God to love. *	SA	A	D	SD
God's compassion knows no religious boundaries.	SA	A	D	SD

I sometimes feel cradled in God's arms.	SA	A	D	SD
God has never asked me to do hard things. *	SA	A	D	SD
Running the world is more important to God than caring about people. *	SA	A	D	SD
I often feel that I am in the hands of God.	SA	A	D	SD
I don't think my faith gives me any special influence with God. *	SA	A	D	SD
Mostly, I have to provide for myself. *	SA	A	D	SD
I am particularly drawn to the image of God as a shepherd.	SA	A	D	SD
God feels distant to me. *	SA	A	D	SD
I think human achievements are a delight to God.	SA	A	D	SD
I rarely feel that God is with me. *	SA	A	D	SD
I feel warm inside when I pray.	SA	A	D	SD
I am pretty much responsible for my own life. *	SA	A	D	SD
God rarely ever seems to give me what I ask for. *	SA	A	D	SD
I think God must enjoy getting even with us when we deserve it. *	SA	A	D	SD
God encourages me to go forward on the journey of life.	SA	A	D	SD
God sometimes intervenes at my request.	SA	A	D	SD
God never reaches out to me. *	SA	A	D	SD
God doesn't mind if I don't grow very much. *	SA	A	D	SD
I sometimes think that not even God could love me. *	SA	A	D	SD

*Reverse score.

Lawrence, R. T. (1997). Measuring the image of God: The God image inventory and the God image scales. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, 214-226.

APPENDIX F: Spiritual Assessment Inventory, Instability and Awareness Subscales

Please respond to each statement below by circling the number that best represents your experience in the box to the right of the statement. It is best to answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Give the answer that comes to mind first. Don't spend too much time thinking about an item. Give the best possible response to each statement even if it does not provide all the information you would like. Try your best to respond to all statements. Your answers will be completely confidential.

1	2	3	4	5
Not At All True	Slightly True	Moderately True	Substantially True	Very True

I am afraid that God will give up on me.	1	2	3	4	5
My emotional connection with God is unstable.	1	2	3	4	5
There are times when I feel that God is punishing me.	1	2	3	4	5
I worry that I will be left out of God's plans.	1	2	3	4	5
When I sin, I tend to withdraw from God.	1	2	3	4	5
I am always in the mood to pray.	1	2	3	4	5
There are times when I feel that God is angry at me.	1	2	3	4	5
When I sin, I am afraid of what God will do to me.	1	2	3	4	5
When I feel God is not protecting me, I tend to feel worthless.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a sense of how God is working in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
God's presence feels very real to me.	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to God is an essential part of my life.	1	2	3	4	5

I am aware of God prompting me to do things.	1	2	3	4	5
My experiences of God's responses to me impact me greatly.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God's presence in my interactions with other people.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God responding to me in a variety of ways.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God attending to me in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God telling me to do something.	1	2	3	4	5
My experiences of God's presence impacts me greatly.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a sense of the direction in which God is guiding me.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God communicating to me in a variety of ways.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God's presence in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5
From day to day, I sense God being with me.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a sense of God communicating guidance to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I experience an awareness of God speaking to me personally.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a strong impression of God's presence.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of God being very near to me.	1	2	3	4	5
When I consult God about decisions in my life, I am aware to my prayers of his direction and help.	1	2	3	4	5

Hall, T. W., & Edwards, K. J. (2002). The spiritual assessment inventory: A theistic model and measure for assessing spiritual development. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, 341-357.

APPENDIX G: Brief Measure of Religious Coping

Directions: Think of a recent struggle in your life. How much did you use the following activities in coping? Carefully read each item below and circle the item that best describes your experience.

0-not at all

1-Somewhat

2-Quite a bit

3-A great deal

1. I looked for a stronger connection with God.	0	1	2	3
2. I sought God's love and care.	0	1	2	3
3. I sought help from God in letting go of my anger.	0	1	2	3
4. I tried to put my plans in action together with God.	0	1	2	3
5. I tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.	0	1	2	3
6. I asked forgiveness from my sins.	0	1	2	3
7. I focused on my religion to stop worrying about my problems.	0	1	2	3
8. I wondered whether God had abandoned me.	0	1	2	3
9. I felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.	0	1	2	3
10. I wondered what I did for God to punish me.	0	1	2	3
11. I questioned God's love for me.	0	1	2	3
12. I wondered whether my church had abandoned me.	0	1	2	3

13. I decided the devil made this happen.	0	1	2	3
14. I questioned the power of God.	0	1	2	3

Pergament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative coping with major life stressors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37, 710-724.

APPENDIX H: Theistic Spiritual Outcomes Survey

Directions: Please help us understand how you have been feeling spiritually this past week, including today. Carefully read each item below and circle number that best describes how you felt.

- 1-Never
- 2-Rarely
- 3-Sometimes
- 4- Frequently
- 5- Almost Always

I had feelings of love toward others.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt there is a spiritual purpose for my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt good about my moral behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
I wanted to make the world a better place.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt peaceful.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt appreciation for the beauty of nature.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt like praying.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt spiritually alive.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt worthy.	1	2	3	4	5
My behavior was congruent with my values.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt love for all of humanity.	1	2	3	4	5
I had faith in God's will.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt like helping others.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt God's love.	1	2	3	4	5

I praised and worshipped God.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt forgiveness toward others.	1	2	3	4	5
I loved myself.	1	2	3	4	5

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APPENDIX I: Indiscriminate Proreligiousness Scale
Personal Form

Directions: Please help us understand the role of regular church attendance in your life. Carefully read each item below and write the word that best describes your response to the item, either true or false.

1. Religious services always give me new insight into my beliefs. _____
2. I am always inspired by the sermon topics. _____
3. Sometimes I daydream during services. * _____
4. I always try to use the message of the weekly sermon in me daily life. _____
5. There have been times when I doubted the existence of God. * _____
6. I always live by my religious beliefs. _____
7. My religious beliefs guide me in every one of my daily actions. _____
8. There are times when I do not feel like going to church. * _____
9. Praying always brings me inner peace. _____
10. Sometimes I feel that the teachings of my religion ask too much of me. * _____
11. I never disobey the teachings of my faith. _____
12. When things are going well for me, I sometimes forget to thank God. _____

*Reverse Scored

Pergament, K. I., Brannick, M. T., Adamakos, H., Ensing, D. S., Kelemen, M. L., Warren, R. K., Falgout, K., Cook, P., & Myers, J. (1987). Indiscriminant proreligiousness: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, 26, 182-200.

APPENDIX J: Debriefing Form

You have just been a participant in a study to examine the effect of treatment on God Image as measured by the pre-group and post-group questionnaires. This process involves collecting data, and then analyzing the collection of results to assess this relationship. This information will be helpful in basic research examining how spiritually-oriented group therapy influences God Image change. If you would like information on this study, or if you would like to review the results of this study, please contact Ms. Jacqueline Rasar at jrasar@fwbbc.edu or jdrasar@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX K: God Image Group 1
Discovering God
Group Leader Manual

By

Glendon Moriarty

Used with Permission

Revised By

Jacqueline Rasar

Doctoral Candidate

Week 1

God Image Introduction

Welcome and Introductions

Group Ground Rules:

1. All group members will be ready to start group on time at each session.
2. All group members will be respectful toward the other members of the group.
3. All group members are responsible to do the weekly homework. If any group member does not complete his or her homework more than twice, he or she will be asked to leave the group.
4. All group members will listen to other group members and not monopolize the time.

Format for each group:

Total Group Time: 55 minutes

5 Minutes: Welcome and Icebreaker

10 Minutes: Discussion of Homework

15 Minutes: Reflection and Educational Component

20 Minutes: Discussion

5 Minutes: Assignment of Homework and Closing

Discuss of the direction of the group

Reflection:

Humans live in an uncomfortable state of incompleteness. We intuitively know that something has gone awry and that we are supposed to be whole, but are instead broken. We crave fullness, but are instead wanting. We desire perfect health and love, but cannot achieve it. Total wholeness is a longed for state, but is always over the next hill or around the next corner. It is as if someone has played a cruel trick, for we have a taste for complete health, but will never experience it. The sense of oneness that we long for is reminiscent of an earlier time.

- Moriarty, 2006

Lies you may have encountered:

1. “You are the only one with problems. No one else has problems in their relationship with God.”
2. “My problems are unique. I am too much of a mess. God can forgive/love others, but not me.”
3. “If you talk about your problems, people will not like you. They will think you are ‘ungodly’.”
4. “It is best to solve your own problems. Do not rely on others. No one wants to be dragged down with you.”

During the group we will seek to find out why we have developed difficulties relating to God as He truly is. This journey will involve letting down some walls and letting others inside. This process will occur slowly. No one is expected to share their deepest issues on the first day. But, as the group continues, it is hoped that the group members will prove to be trustworthy, loving, and accepting. Through this safe environment, real change and growth can take place.

Assign Homework**Closing**

Homework: Week 1

The Struggle:

Before the biblical fall of humankind, Adam and Eve existed in a state of oneness with God. They were one-hundred percent free, uninhibited, and innocent. After the fall, sin entered the world and they became separated from God and, consequently, self-aware. Adam and Eve no longer felt whole and were instead riddled with feeling incomplete.

Gary moon (1997), in his aptly titled book Homesick for Eden, discusses how this fundamental separation leaves us longing for God. He quotes Larry Crabb,

Ever since God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, we have lived in an unnatural environment – a world in which we were not designed to live. We were built to enjoy a garden without weeds, relationships without friction, fellowship without distance. But something is wrong and we know it, both within our world and within ourselves. Deep inside we sense we're out of the nest, always ending the day in a motel room and never at home (p. 11).

As human beings longing for wholeness, we are aware of our need for God. We want to put our faith in something, or more accurately, someone who can fill that “God shaped hole.” At the same time, many of us are left wondering why God has not filled that hole the way we hoped He would. Though we believe God is there with us, it feels like He is nowhere to be found.

Is this in any way similar to your experience? Please explain.

Exercise: God Image Drawing

Please draw a picture of you and God below.

Draw a picture of how you feel you and God look after you have done something wrong.

Week 2

God Image and God Concept

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Why are there differences between the first and second pictures?

Does God feel any different toward you when you “miss the mark?”

Why or why not?

Educational Component: The God Image and God Concept

God Image (Heart)

The God Image is the subjective emotional experience of God. It is shaped by our experience of our parents and enables us to continue earlier learned relational patterns (Rizzuto, 1979 & Lawrence, 1997).

“People need a consistent sense of self to feel secure, so they pattern future relationships after what they learned in their relationship with their parents. Their relationship with God is no different. If a child feels he has to be perfect to please his parents, then he will feel he has to be perfect to please God. Conversely, if a child feels he can make mistakes and be accepted by his parents, then he will feel he can make mistakes and be accepted by God” (Moriarty, 2006).

God Concept (Head)

The intellectual, theoretical, mental definition of the word “God” is shaped by religious education and exists more as an abstract concept than an immediate emotional reality (Lawrence, 1997; Rizzuto, 1979).

“The God concept is the intellectual understanding of God (Lawrence, 1997). It is based on what is taught about God in catechism or Sunday school, Bible studies and sermons. The God concept is an objective and abstract understanding of God. Most individuals reared in the Christian faith have a God concept that is characterized by love, strength, and wisdom” (Moriarty, 2006).

In the drawings we completed for homework last week, the first picture seems to represent the God concept, while the second picture most accurately represents the God image.

Discussion:

Discuss and explain differences between God Concept (Head) and God Image (Heart).

How have these differences manifested in your life?

Homework: Week 2: Parent/God Image Grid

Our relationship with our parents shapes the way we experience God. This exercise will help you get a better understanding of this “shaping” process. Check the appropriate squares as you recall how your father related to you when you were young.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY FATHER WAS...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						
Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						
Protective						
Passive						

Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						
Unpredictable						

*Used with permission from Rapha's 12-Step Program for Overcoming Chemical Dependency (USA: Rapha Publications, 1990 15-33). This exercise is reprinted here with permission from Rapha Publications. You can find more information at www.searchlight.com. Available at this website are important and insightful books from Robert McGee, the author of the Christian classic The Search for Significance.

Evaluation of Your Relationship with Your Father

- What does this inventory tell you about your relationship with your father?

- If you were an objective observer of the type of relationship you have just described, how would you feel about the father?

- How would you feel about the child?

- How would you respond to the father? Please be specific.

- How would you respond to the child? Please be specific.

Now complete the same exercise, but this time evaluate your relationship with your mother.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY MOTHER WAS...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						
Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						
Protective						
Passive						
Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						

Unpredictable						
---------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

Evaluation of Your Relationship with Your Mother

- What does this inventory tell you about your relationship with your mother?

- If you were an objective observer of the type of relationship you have just described, how would you feel about the mother?

- How would you feel about the child?

- How would you respond to the mother? Please be specific.

- How would you respond to the child? Please be specific.

Evaluating Your Relationship with God

We can begin to see how our relationships with our parents have influenced our perception of God when we evaluate our present relationship with God. The following inventory will help you to determine some of your feelings toward God. Because it is subjective, there are no right or wrong answers. To ensure that the test reveals your actual feelings, please follow the instructions carefully.

- Answer openly and honestly. Don't respond from a theological knowledge of God, but from personal experience.
- Don't describe what the relationship ought to be, or what you hope it will be, but what it is right now.

- Some people feel God might be displeased if they give a negative answer. Nothing is further from the truth. God is pleased with our honesty. A foundation of transparency is required for growth to occur.
- Turn each characteristic into a question. For example: To what degree do I really feel that God loves me? To what degree do I really feel that God understands me?

To what degree do I really feel God is...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						
Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						

Protective						
Passive						
Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						
Unpredictable						

- What does this exercise tell you about your relationship with your God?

- Are there any differences between what you know (theologically) and how you feel (emotionally) about God? If so, what are they?

Your Father's Influence on Your Relationship with God

Now that we have examined your current relationship with God, let's look at how your relationship with your earthly father has influenced your perception of God. To make a comparison, transfer all of the check marks you made for your own father to the shaded columns on the next page. When you have completed this, transfer the check marks you made which relate to your relationship with God. To make them more obvious, use an "X" for this category. Put them in the white columns in the appropriate places.

Characteristics	Always		Very Often		Some-Times		Hardly Ever		Never		Don't know	
Gentle												
Stern												
Loving												
Aloof												
Disapproving												
Distant												
Close and Intimate												
Kind												
Angry												
Caring												
Demanding												
Supportive												
Interested												
Discipliner												
Gracious												
Harsh												
Wise												
Holy												
Leader												
Provider												
Trustworthy												
Joyful												
Forgiving												
Good												
Cherishing of Me												
Compassionate												
Impatient												
Unreasonable												

Strong											
Protective											
Passive											
Encouraging											
Sensitive											
Just											
Unpredictable											

- What characteristics are the same for both your father and God?

- Which characteristics are quite different (two or more boxes from each other)?

- What patterns (if any) do you see?

- Write a summary paragraph about how your perception of God has been shaped by your relationship with your father.

Your Mother's Influence on Your Relationship with God

How has your mother influenced your perception of God? To make a comparison, transfer all of the check marks you made for your own mother to the shaded columns on the next page. When you have completed this, transfer the check marks you made which relate to your relationship with God. To make them more obvious, use an "X" for this category. Put them in the white columns in the appropriate places.

Characteristics	Always		Very Often		Some-Times		Hardly Ever		Never		Don't know	
Gentle												
Stern												
Loving												
Aloof												
Disapproving												
Distant												
Close and Intimate												
Kind												
Angry												
Caring												
Demanding												
Supportive												
Interested												
Discipliner												
Gracious												
Harsh												
Wise												
Holy												
Leader												
Provider												
Trustworthy												
Joyful												
Forgiving												
Good												
Cherishing of Me												
Compassionate												
Impatient												

Unreasonable											
Strong											
Protective											
Passive											
Encouraging											
Sensitive											
Just											
Unpredictable											

- What characteristics are the same for both your mother and God?

- Which characteristics are quite different (two or more boxes from each other)?

Week 3

How did the God Image develop?

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Is your God Image more like your mother or father?

What were the strongest positive aspects of your God Image?

What were the strongest negative aspects of your God Image?

Educational Component: My parents, My hurts, and My God Image

Before we begin let me first warn you that the following discussion can be frightening because it breaks one of the main rules: “Never say anything negative about your parents.” This is uncomfortable, but necessary to overcoming emotional difficulties. All parents are imperfect; some are good, others are average, and some are poor. Because we live in a fallen world, all parents are limited in their ability to love their children, and therefore all parents wound their children in some way or another.

Problems with parents can run the gamut. You may have had parents that clearly loved you, but were not as emotionally available as you needed them to be. Maybe you were sure that they valued you, but they would spend long hours working. Perhaps you had a parent who was too depressed to be there for you. Maybe you had an alcoholic parent that you had to distract, so he or she would not harm your siblings. Whatever the situation, we all had different parents who experienced different limitations. These limitations cause

different problems, among the most common are perfectionism, worthlessness, guilt, and fear of abandonment.

Discussion:

What has been the message behind the wounds you have experienced?

How has this message affected your relationship with God?

How do you believe the real God would address these hurts if He were to speak to them right now? Please take a few minutes and write in the space provided what you believe He would say to you (speak from His point of view).

Group Exercise:

Often individuals who have felt worthless, guilty, or fearful in their relationship with God are freely able to give God’s grace, love, and mercy to others. There seems to be this lie that somehow convinces us that we are in some way or another “unique” or God would not want to love us like He loves everyone else.

Let's go around in a circle and encourage the person next to us as we believe the real God would encourage them (again, speak from God's point of view). What would the real God want your brother or sister to know about his/her fear?

Homework: Week 3

Please read the following: “How did your God Image Develop?”

The God Image is not something that just appears once you start thinking about God; rather, it is something that is with you from early childhood and something that stays with you throughout all the twists and turns of your life. It can be tempting to think of it as a fixed idea that exists, untouched, in the corner of your soul. This is misleading because it is actually a fluid emotional concept that changes along with your growing personality.

To get a better picture of how this occurs, let's turn back the clock and go back to your earliest years to see how your God Image has developed. In fact, let's begin with your parents, before you were even born, when you were just a twinkle in your mother's eye. If you are a parent, then you know what it is like to learn that you or your partner is expecting. Depending on your situation, this news can be greeted with joy, regret, or ambivalence. Try to think back to what you can remember about the circumstances that surrounded your birth.

Maybe you were planned or perhaps you were unexpected. Maybe you were warmly received, but worried about. Perhaps you do not know your parents or maybe you choose to forget them. Regardless of your situation, your parents significantly impacted you. They brought you into this world and provided you with the raw material you needed to adapt and grow into the person you are.

One thing that your parents did that influenced your identity is that they named you. The process of picking a name is a very meaningful ritual that shaped the way your parents saw you. I do not even have kids, but I already have favorite names picked out. Attached to those names are preconceived ideas of who we expect our children to be. Likewise, your parents had an idea of who you would be and that is what is symbolized in the name they chose for you.

Some parents are better than others at giving up these preconceived notions. You may have seen parents who refuse to give up their ideas of who their children should be. These parents do not realize what kind of harm they are doing. They influence their children to forsake their natural strivings and instead conform to what they want. If this happened to you, then you may have the sense that “who you are” is not “who God wants

you to be.” You may sense that your natural interests are wrong and that you instead have to fit into an ideal that God expects you to meet.

The early childhood factor that influenced the formation of your God image the most is your relationship with your chief caregiver. This was the person who was most responsible for your development as a child. That person is usually your mother but it could have been your father, grandmother, aunt, or friend. To simplify, I will refer to the chief caregiver as “mother,” but feel free to insert the name of someone else who may have played this role in your life.

The relationship between you and your mother did more than any other relationship in shaping your personality. You were completely dependent upon her and naturally stayed closely connected to her. Harry Stack Sullivan observed that long after the physical umbilical cord is cut, the emotional umbilical cord remains fully connected. What your mother felt, you felt. What she feared, you feared. What she loved, you loved. You did not know the exact nature of the things that she loved and feared, but you picked up on and experienced her feelings about those things.

The attachment between you and your mother provided the foundation upon which your idea of yourself, others, and God was built. This bond became the backdrop of your life; the ground from which your understanding of existence emerged. Erik Erikson suggested that this early experience taught you to either fundamentally trust the world or to fundamentally mistrust the world. If you sensed that your mother loved and accepted you, then you learned that others and God could be trusted. If you did not feel loved and accepted, then you may have difficulty trusting others and God.

The degree of trust that you developed also influenced the extent to which you could separate from your mother. All children have a drive to become their own person. This is technically referred to as the separation-individuation process and includes the terrible two’s— when children learn to assert themselves and say “no.” If you felt safe and like your mother could take care of herself, then you probably honored the drive to individuate from your mother. On the other hand, if you did not feel safe, then you probably stayed close to your mother and stunted your drive toward growth.

This stage can have a strong influence on your personal relationship with God. If you felt like your mother wanted you to psychologically grow and separate, then you probably experience God as mature and giving. If you felt that your mother did not want you to

grow, then you may experience God as immature or needy. You may not even be conscious of this process, but have a vague sense that if you grow too much or become too independent, then God will withdraw from you. Some people report wanting to pursue a dream, but fear that it is not God's will. They tend to be overly focused on following God's plan for their life even though they are not sure what that plan is. If you struggle with this, then you may sense that you are eternally waiting for direction from God. You may be afraid to make any bold moves, just in case they are not in line with God's will.

The next phase you entered, between the ages of 3 and 4, is the transitional stage. This is marked by the development of the imagination. In a short period of time your internal world became populated with a variety of fantastic creatures. Elves, witches, monsters, and superheroes are some of the more popular ones. You utilized these imaginary creatures to help you adapt and cope with the pressures you encountered in your world. At that time in your life, God was officially introduced to you.

It did not take you long to figure out that God was not like the other creatures that populated your mind (Rizzuto, 1979). Instead, God was taken seriously. Parents spoke sternly about God, visited God's house, and met with God's representatives. With this information, you began to shape your image of God. From the behavior of adults and environmental cues, you realized that God is in charge of everything, is all-powerful, and all-knowing. You only knew two other people like that: Mom and Dad. Out of necessity, you crafted your God Image in the likeness of your parents. If your relationship with your parents was healthy, then your God Image was healthy. If your relationship with your parents was unhealthy, then your God image was unhealthy.

This developmental time is also marked by the discovery of a special object. The blanket that Linus, the Peanuts character, carried with him is a popular example. This object can take on a variety of forms, but is usually a stuffed animal, toy, or blanket. It is known as a transitional object; because it helped you transition away from your caregivers and to a more independent state. It represented your mother and enabled you to soothe yourself by reducing your anxiety.

The object exists in what Donald Winnicott termed transitional space. That is, it exists between the external world and the internal world; it is not completely objective or completely subjective. Instead, it incorporates aspects of the two.

To illustrate this concept to my students, I bring in a sharpei (i.e., the overly wrinkly looking dog) stuffed animal, affectionately known as "Beans." I pass Beans around the

class and ask each of the students to get an idea as to how Beans is feeling. Beans has a neutral face; that is, he doesn't look happy or sad. His neutrality makes it easy for my students to project whatever they are feeling onto him. After all of them have finished looking at Beans I have them volunteer how they perceived Beans was feeling. Each student offers a different response, which usually corresponds to his or her particular mood.

Beans is a good transitional object because he is external (outside the self – not purely subjective or imaginary) and internal – each of us is allowed to project our own feelings onto him. Doing this makes him special to each of us and allows us to experience him in whatever way we need to.

Just as my students projected their feelings onto Beans, you projected your feelings onto your transitional object. Engaging in this process allowed you to separate from your mother and it also provided you with a template to further develop your God Image. The God Image is a special type of transitional object, because it is not completely objective or completely subjective. That is, it exists both inside and outside of you at the same time. For example, most of us agree that God exists and is external, but each of us perceives God internally in a different manner. This allows our idea of God to be validated by others because it exists outside the self and, at the same time, to be personally meaningful because it is experienced inside the self.

After the close of the transitional stage, your God Image was continually shaped by your curiosity. You likely asked a number of questions, including “Who made the sky? Where does God live? How old is God? Does God cry?” At that period, you also believed that your parents knew everything that you did and all of your thoughts. This belief was also translated to God.

The next stage of development is the Oedipal phase. This occurs between the ages of 4 to 6 and is marked by intense feelings for the parent of the opposite sex. If you grew up in a healthy family, then you probably navigated this conflict with success and gradually concluded that you could not have your parent all to yourself. This was a great loss, but instead of facing this reality entirely, you unconsciously transferred all of your feelings over to the parent of the same sex. Eventually, you concluded that you could not have this parent all to yourself either. At that point, you began to see your parents from a more objective stance. Also, at that time, a conscious differentiation between parents and God

occurred. You then knew that your parents could not “hear” your internal dialogue, but you knew God still could (Rizzuto, 1979).

If you grew up in a dysfunctional family, then you probably had a more difficult time with this conflict. Your fundamental needs may have not been satisfactorily met. As a result, you may have sought out others to try to complete yourself. As you moved into adolescence, you may have attempted to lock onto your God Image to satisfy this deep longing. Your relationship with God may have been “highly charged,” but still unable to meet your inner needs.

Whether you successfully resolved this conflict or not, the God Image continued to change with your growing personality. The dawn of puberty signaled the onset of your ability to think abstractly, which in turn influenced the way you thought about God. The God image is also impacted by other life transitions. For example, moving into early adulthood probably caused you to become more responsible and change the way you saw yourself and others. As you passed through each stage in life, you changed your God Image to keep it consistent with your self-perception.

The way you see yourself is very powerful and influences the way you emotionally experience God. Benson and Spilka (1973) discovered that individuals with high self-esteem had a positive God Image, whereas those with low self-esteem had a negative God Image. If people have a high self-esteem, then it is likely they will feel God loves them. If they have a low self-esteem, then it is likely they will feel that God does not love them. The results of this study make intuitive sense. Think about it. How often do you find people who think they are a complete failure, convinced that God is absolutely crazy about them? On the other hand, how often do you find people who have a high self-esteem convinced that God regrets creating them? These situations are abnormal. They usually do not happen. The reason they do not happen is because people’s idea of self and idea of how God feels about them are usually consistent. These are similar because the self has a natural tendency toward maintaining consistency. When the self changes, the God Image will change along with it.

Michael Boivin (2003) has written a fascinating article entitled Finding God in Prozac or Finding Prozac in God. He discusses the role that this anti-depressant has played in changing the self and God Image of religious individuals. These individuals prayed, read scriptures, and used other spiritual disciplines, but did not experience relief from depression or an increase in their experience of God’s love. Like psychotherapy, Prozac affected the self of these individuals, resulting in a decrease of depressive symptoms and

an increase in their spiritual walk with God. In writing about Prozac, Boivin (2002) states, “[it is] not that it can enhance emotional or psychological well-being where prayer did not; rather that it reveals to us more than ever just how interwoven the biochemistry of the brain is to who we are and how we relate to each other and to God” (p. 161).

To sum up, the God Image developed along with your growing personality. Many important aspects of the formation of the God Image occurred early in your life. Through this time, via the relationship with your parents, you came to a number of conclusions about God.

The first is whether or not God can be trusted. The second is whether or not God wanted you to grow. These early experiences set the foundation of your God Image, but it continued to change along with your personality, particularly during times of transition and change. This is explained by the close relationship between your sense of self and God Image. If you feel positive about yourself then you probably feel that God accepts you. If you feel negative about yourself, then you may sometimes feel rejected by God.

Reflection Questions:

What parts of the God image development process do you most identify with?

What really stands out to you?

Please pick a hymn you have found encouraging in the past and read it each day this week in the morning and in the evening.

Name of Hymn: _____

Week 4

God Image, Christianity, and the Cognitive Map

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

How was your experience reading “How did your God Image develop?”

Did you gain any insight from this reading?

What hymn did you choose?

How was your experience reading through this hymn this past week?

Educational Component: How does the God Image relate to Christianity?

As human beings longing for wholeness, we are aware of the need for God. We want to put our faith in something, or more accurately, someone who can fill that “God shaped hole.”

In a perfect world the God Image and the true God would be one and the same. Unfortunately, this is not the case and we often tune into negative messages from our internal critical parents and attribute them to the true God. I believe God has made parents imperfect, so that we would be motivated to search out Someone who is perfect (White, 1984). I also believe that God communicates with us through our own God Image. I see the process of therapy as a means by which the God Image is changed to be a better, and more accurate, receiver of God’s love. The God Image is like a filter that has to be cleaned so that we can experience God in a more accurate manner. It can also be seen as an antennae, or satellite dish, that often times picks up our parents’ voices and it needs to be adjusted so that we can more clearly hear God’s voice.

Brief Discussion Time

Maps for the Journey

Have you ever left on a trip and become lost along the way? If you have a map, then this situation can be quickly resolved. A map is helpful because it gives you a bigger picture and allows you to see where you have taken a wrong turn. Once you locate yourself, you can then take steps to get back on the right track.

An atlas is helpful, but what about a chart that helps you find your way when you are lost on your life journey? Well, just as there are people who create roadmaps, there are psychologists who create life-maps. These maps are based on different types of research and psychological theory.

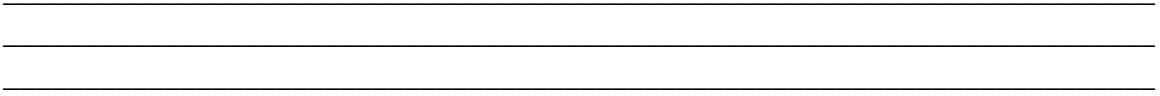
The map that we will be working with is called the cognitive map. The goal is for you to orient yourself to this, so that you have a better understanding of how your emotional hurts developed. These descriptions will show you how the route you took through life has impacted your God image. Once you are aware of the path you have taken, you will be in a better position to head-out in a new, and healing, direction.

Group Exercise: The Cognitive Map

Thoughts are extremely powerful in changing the way we feel. To illustrate this, allow yourself to engage in this brief exercise.

Recall something that you regret doing – something that was moderately emotionally painful. Shut your eyes and re-imagine the event for approximately 30 seconds, then stop (Beck, 1979).

How do you feel? Jot down a few words describing how you feel.



Week 5
Cognitive Techniques

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

What was your experience writing the journal entry?

Who anyone like to read your journal entry out loud?

Educational Component: Review of Cognitive Theory

As we discussed last week, cognitive therapy changes the way that people think in order to change the way that they feel. The basic premise underlying cognitive theory is that there is a crucial connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Each of us has many different thoughts that occur to us throughout the day; a thought occurs that triggers a certain feeling or mood, which subsequently triggers a behavior.

Thoughts→Feelings→Behavior

Cognitive theorists break problematic ways of thinking down into three main components.

The first is automatic thoughts.

The second examines cognitive errors.

The third involves core beliefs.

Automatic thoughts are defined as “thoughts or visual images individuals may be unaware of unless attention is purposely focused on them” (Beck et. al. 1979, p. 187). They further elucidate that automatic thoughts have specific criterial attributes.

- (1) They are automatic – they occur as if by reflex, without prior reasoning;
- (2) They are unreasonable and dysfunctional;
- (3) They seem completely plausible and are uncritically accepted as valid even though they seem bizarre upon reflection;
- (4) They are involuntary (Beck et. al., 1979, p. 166).

God Image Automatic Thought Record

A variety of interventions are used to change negative, irrational patterns of thinking. We will work through one today called the God Image Automatic Thought Record. The goal is to uncover and then change the automatic thoughts through utilizing the God Image Automatic Thought Record – GIATR (see below). Take 15 minutes at the end of each day and think of specific events that caused you to feel God’s disappointment, anger, frustration, etc. Initially just fill out the first three columns: Situation, Degree of Emotion, and Irrational God Image Automatic Thought. After you have mastered this, answer your Irrational God Image Automatic Thought under the fourth column, which is the Real God Response. You can craft the Real God Response by drawing on your understanding of scripture and faith. Then rate the percentage (0 to 100%) of belief in the Rational God Response. In the final column, rate the degree of emotion after thinking about the Real God Response.

This technique will encourage you to dispute the Irrational God Image Automatic Thoughts by questioning whether the thoughts come from the God of Christianity or the God of internal parents or self-esteem. Each time you differentiate, you will be made more aware and more able to change your thoughts from ones that are irrational to ones that are rational. This will also help you own your thoughts. Instead of seeing thoughts as foreign intrusions from a punitive deity, you may learn that the thoughts are self-imposed and consequently can be self-controlled.

To further illustrate how this technique works, consider Bob. Bob has a number of automatic thoughts that caused him to feel worthless and experience God as rejecting. I used this tool to help Bob identify and change these thoughts. His thoughts are recorded on his GIATR below. I have included an additional, blank, GIATR for your use.

Life Example: Bob

Bob is a 37-year old clergy person who is depressed and feels like he cannot win God's approval or acceptance. He grew up with a father who abused alcohol and was extremely critical and rejecting of him. His mother was passive and failed to protect him from his father's painful insults. Bob blamed himself for his problems with his father and thought it was his responsibility to mend their relationship. This, despite Bob's efforts, never happened. In his early adult years, Bob married his wife, Joan. He described their marriage as "okay," but referred to himself as a "terrible" husband. Shortly after marrying, Bob went into seminary and gained a solid theological understanding of the faith.

In seminary, Bob learned of a loving and accepting God, but these beliefs were stuck in his head and never made it to his heart. The God he cognitively understood was different from the God he emotionally experienced. The God he experienced seemed much more personal, real and alive to him than the God he learned about in seminary. This God was felt and immediate, whereas the Christian God was abstract and removed. The hurtful God's edicts were automatically convincing, whereas the real God's tenants were ideas he had to deliberately think about to believe. Ironically, it seemed natural and easier to believe in this false and painful God, than it was to believe in the true and healing real God.

This belief in the false God occurred effortlessly, because it resembled his relationship with his father. Bob often felt like he fell short and like he could have done better. As a result, he felt he deserved the harsh judgments and negative criticism he received from his harmful God Image. He evaluated his performances and concluded that he could be a more loving husband, could be a more available pastor and could be a better Christian. Because Bob did not do these things perfectly, in his mind, he felt justifiably disapproved of.

Bob's God Image was a taskmaster that expected more from Bob than he could realistically give. As a result, Bob usually felt guilty and like he should have accomplished more. As one might guess, the idea of taking personal time was something that his brain could not compute. If he did take the morning off, then he would feel crippled with guilt and would not find relief until he made it into the office.

His God Image also shared similarities with his relationship with his mother. Bob could not approach his God with concerns or complaints for fear that bringing up less than positive things would result in emotional abandonment. Bob, as a young child, got the message that he was to keep a smiling face on despite his pain. He transferred this to his God Image and, as a result, did not feel comfortable approaching God with painful issues or complaints about situations he did not understand. Instead, Bob felt it was his job to manage these burdens on his own.

Bob's God was not one of one of unmerited grace, but one of earned salvation. You had to perform to win a pat on the back. Bob would do his best to live a clean and holy life, but, like all of us, would inevitably "slip up." This God that tolerated him when he was close to perfect, became angry and shaming whenever Bob missed the mark. At these times, he sensed God's displeasure and felt like he had to earn his way back into His good graces. Bob would repent and spend lengthy amounts of time in prayer to prove that he was sorry. He would try his hardest not to slip up again. After about 2 weeks of prayer and worship, Bob would feel welcomed back again by God. Unfortunately, it was only a matter of time till he did something he regretted and would then once again find himself feeling rejected and ashamed for what he had done – disgusted with himself for failing once again.

Bob's God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>
<p>I didn't prepare adequately for that sermon. As a result, it fell flat and did not get a very good response.</p>	<p>Worthless 95</p>	<p>God Image Response: "You are a joke as a pastor. You cannot even take time to craft a decent sermon. You are an embarrassment to me." 85%</p>	<p>"Bob, I do not judge you based on your performance. I love you and am proud to be your Father. You are finite and cannot always give 100%, often times you have to accept a less than perfect job."</p>	<p>40% Belief in God Image Irrational Responses 50-Degree of Feeling Worthless</p>
<p>I was sitting in a restaurant and had a lustful thought when I was looking at an attractive woman.</p>	<p>Shameful 98</p>	<p>God Image Response: "What is wrong with you? You are a pastor, but a complete mess. You will never make progress in this area." 88%</p>	<p>"Bob, I hear you asking for forgiveness and want you to know that I accept you and want to help you with these issues. You do not</p>	<p>43% Belief in God Image Irrational Response 55-Degree of Feeling</p>

<p>I waited at the door to meet the new church family, but they ignored me and left in a hurry.</p>	<p>Rejected 70</p>	<p>God Image Response: “You did a poor job leading the service. No wonder they did not want to talk to you. They will never come back.” 65%</p>	<p>have to be ashamed or hide things from me. I love you.”</p> <p>“Bob, I will never leave you or abandon you. My presence in your life is not dependent on how well the church members like you.”</p>	<p>Shameful</p> <p>35% Belief in God Image Irrational Response</p> <p>25-Degree of Feeling Rejected</p>
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Group exercise: Have one member of the group work through a God Image Automatic Thought Record in the session.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

Homework: Week 5

- Complete 3 different entries on the God Image Automatic Thought Records on the following pages.
- This week instead of just reading a hymn in the morning and the evening, sing the hymn several times a day including morning and evening.
- Set up a meeting with one of your fellow group members to work through a GIATR.
- To read some common cognitive errors, please view the list below.

Common Cognitive Errors:

1. Over-generalizing: Drawing sweeping inferences (e.g., “I can’t control my temper”) from a single instance.
2. Discounting the positives: Deciding that if a good thing has happened, it couldn’t have been very important.
3. Jumping to conclusions: Focusing on one aspect of a situation in deciding how to understand it (e.g., “The reason I haven’t received a phone call from the job I applied to is that they have decided not to offer it to me”).
4. Mind reading: Believing one knows what another person is thinking, with very little evidence.
5. Fortune telling: Believing one knows what the future holds, while ignoring other possibilities.
6. Magnifying/minimizing: Evaluating the importance of a negative event, or the lack of importance of a positive event, in a distorted manner.
7. Emotional reasoning: Believing that something must be true, because it feels like it is true.
8. Making “should” statements: Telling oneself one should do (or should have done) something, when it is more accurate to say that one would like to do (or wishes one had done) the preferred thing.
9. Labeling: Using a label (“bad mother,” “idiot”) to describe behavior, and then imputing all the meanings the label carries.

10. Inappropriate blaming: using hindsight to determine what one “should have done,” even if one could not have known the best thing to do at the time; ignoring mitigating factors; or ignoring the roles played by others in determining a negative outcome.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

Week 6
Cognitive Distortions

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

What was the experience like completing GIATR's?

What did you learn through the meeting with your fellow group member?

Educational Component: Cognitive Distortions

At times our thinking is not as accurate as we “think” it is. Researchers in psychology have found several cognitive distortions that humans are prone to engage in. Below is a description of the three most common cognitive distortions and ways to fight them.

Filtering

Filtering occurs when a person filters out the positive and looks only at the negative. Filtering also happens when a person's God image focuses on their weaknesses and mistakes rather than their strengths and victories. Solution – Shift the focus. Example – Bob's God Image was emphasizing what Bob thought was a poor sermon. Bob switched the focus to the other things that went well and prayed about those events.

Discussion:

At times it is much easier to find our faults than our strengths. Can you think of any areas in your relationship with God where you have been filtering out God's love, grace, and acceptance and are instead feeling only His fault finding?

Over-generalizations

Bob's God Image told him he was a "complete mess" for having a lustful thought and that he would "never make progress" in that area. Solution – Quantify. Bob realized he had unhealthy sexual thoughts about 20% of the time and healthy sexual thoughts 80% of the time. He also realized that he was more able to challenge and change his unhealthy sexual thoughts. Bob was making progress and was not a complete mess in this area.

Discussion:

Are there any problem areas of your life where you see yourself failing in ways you feel God is not proud of?

What percent of the time are you actually engaging in these activities?

What percent of the time are you not engaging in these problem areas, but are rather engaging in healthy activity?

Catastrophizing

This occurs when your thoughts snowball (e.g., "I got a C, I'm going to fail out of the program"). After Bob argued with his wife, his God Image told him, "You are a failure as a husband and you are going to get divorced. If you cannot manage your family, how can you expect to guide your congregation?" Solution – Ask, "What are the odds?" Bob and his wife had overcome many difficulties and there was little chance that they would get divorced. An outside observer would not bet against them.

Discussion:

What are some areas of your life where you believe you may have catastrophized a situation?

What are the chances that this situation would actually come true?

How is everyone doing in the process? Where are some areas of pain (painful thinking/emotions) still present?

Homework: Week 6

- Meet with a fellow group member this week. Help each other choose a second meaningful hymn/spiritual song based on areas of desired growth. Then sing that hymn along with your other chosen song twice a day (morning and evening).

Please write the name of your second selected hymn here: _____

- Please begin reading *The Horse and His Boy*. This reading needs to be completed by session 8.
- Complete 3 more God Image Automatic Thought Records.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

Week 7

Negative Core Beliefs or Schemas

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

How did the meeting with your fellow group member go?

Would you like to share something related to the most recent GIATR's?

Education Component: Schemas and God Image

Schemas

Schemas are the core beliefs that maintain a person's negative thinking. Most depressive schemas, or underlying depressive assumptions, are unknown to clients because they are too "deep" (Beck et. al., 1979). That is, they are too close to the self to be immediately observed. One can find their core beliefs through looking for themes in their automatic thoughts. Certain groups or automatic thoughts will fit together and from them a certain theme will emerge. That is, they will share an underlying common denominator. Most core beliefs are vague and are marked by global words like dumb, stupid, ugly, or worthless. They are also sometimes stated in "if-then" propositions, "If I am not competent, then I'm a failure" (DeRubeis, Tang, & Beck, 2001, p. 76). Beck (1976) recorded some of the more popular schemas:

1. In order to be happy, I have to be successful in whatever I undertake.
2. To be happy, I must be accepted (like, admired) by all people at all times.
3. If I'm not on top, I'm a flop.

4. It's wonderful to be popular, famous, wealthy; it's terrible to be unpopular, mediocre.
5. If I make a mistake, then it means I'm inept.
6. My value as a person depends on what others think of me.
7. I can't live without love. If my spouse doesn't love me, then I'm worthless.
8. If somebody disagrees with me, it means he doesn't like me.
9. If I don't take advantage of every opportunity to advance myself, I will regret it later.

Schemas and the God Image

Schemas also influence the way that we experience God. The core beliefs we hold are often reflected in our God Image. For example, Bob felt he had to be stellar in every area of ministry to be acceptable. His God Image paralleled this pattern of thinking by expecting him to perform perfectly in every area of ministry. When Bob inevitably failed, he rejected himself and consequently also felt rejected by his God Image.

One way to change a harmful God image schema is to identify and then renegotiate personal agreements with God (Beck et. al., 1979).

Group Exercise:

1. First, ask yourself what you must do to win God's approval. Would this involve being perfect, always doing what God wants you to do, or something completely other? Take your time with this. Write down a couple ways that you believe you could win God's approval.

2. Secondly, once this is identified, it is helpful to look at it and see if it is valid or even feasible to fulfill. Rewrite the ways you identified to win God's approval and next to them write on a scale from 1-10 how able you feel you are to complete these tasks. A "1

would be “I cannot complete these things at all.” A “10” would be “I am perfectly able to complete these tasks.”

3. Next, think about when you originally made this agreement (i.e. childhood, last year, just today). Often these agreements were originally made when we were children, but nonetheless affect our adult lives today. Spend some time and think about when these thoughts on how to win God’s approval had entered your life. What was going on in your life at that time?

4. Are these beliefs realistic? Do you currently believe that you are able to win God’s approval in such ways? If not, what must an individual do to earn God’s approval? Write a new agreement that is realistic and based on your current understanding of Christianity. Make sure this new agreement is clear, specific and rational, and includes room for failures, missteps, and continued growth. Spend some time thinking about what this would look like and then write it in the space provided below.

Discussion:

Go around the room and have each person share the different parts of their agreement and how they revised it, so that it is more accurate.

How would you understand God's love and grace to fit into this idea of acceptance and approval?

Homework: Week 7

- Please complete The Horse and His Boy the next group session.
- Continue singing the hymn—you may add or change hymns at any time.
- Continue combating irrational thinking through completing the God Image Automatic Thought Records.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100%.
				\

Week 8

Bibliotherapy

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Did any of you select a new hymn? If so, which one did you select? Why did you choose it?

Did any of you complete new GIATRs? If so, would you like to share something from that process?

Educational Component: What is bibliotherapy and how does it work?

Reading Christian fantasy can also be helpful in changing the God image. Christian fantasy brings people into a realm of childlike thought and leaves behind adult-rational thought. Reading books such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, can lead people through an emotional experience. This process can alter the God Image by enabling you to identify with characters that relate to Aslan (i.e., God). Through this passive identification, many people vicariously experience God's forgiveness, grace and love. These healing images can be very powerful and serve as excellent reminders of God's true nature when your God Image is particularly harsh and judgmental.

Reading popular religious works, such as *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, *Basic Christianity* by John Stott, and *Your God is Too Small* by J.B. Phillips, may help you begin to understand more about the Christian faith at an affective level. As you gain more understanding, theology can be further demystified by recommending a simple systematic theology. Through reading these books, you may clarify your beliefs and be better equipped to dispute your irrational thoughts.

Exploratory Questions:

What was your response as you read The Horse and His Boy?

Chapter 11 – “The Unwelcome Fellow Traveler?”

How do you feel toward Aslan in this chapter?

How is Shasta’s experience compared to the way you usually experience God?

Film Clip:

The Chronicles of Narnia – Sacrifice of Aslan (Chapter 17)

How does this clip make you feel toward Aslan?

Scriptures:

What biblical narratives are personally meaningful to you?

Which stories are comforting?

Discussion:

Where is everyone at in the process?

Reminder: Only 1 session left.

Group meal next week!

Homework: Week 8

- Continue completing God Image Automatic Thought Records.
- Continue singing the hymns or worship music.
- Bring a word of encouragement for each group member next week.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

Week 9
Recap and Goodbyes

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Question:

Ask the group members to share their prepared words of encouragement to the person on his/her right and left.

Educational Component:

Provide a brief overview of what the group has covered in the last 8 weeks.

Discussion:

What are the main things you learned?

How do you plan to integrate them into your life?

Closing:

Officially say goodbye to one another. Share any closing thoughts.

Administer Post-Group Questionnaire

APPENDIX L: God Image Group 1
Discovering God
Participant Manual

By

Glendon Moriarty

Used with Permission

Revised By

Jacqueline Rasar

Doctoral Candidate

Week 1
God Image Introduction

Welcome and Introductions

Group Ground Rules:

1. All group members will be ready to start group on time at each session.
2. All group members will be respectful toward the other members of the group.
3. All group members are responsible to do the weekly homework. If any group member does not complete his or her homework more than twice, he or she will be asked to leave the group.
4. All group members will listen to other group members and not monopolize the time.

Format for each group:

Total Group Time: 55 minutes

5 Minutes: Welcome and Icebreaker

10 Minutes: Discussion of Homework

15 Minutes: Reflection and Educational Component

20 Minutes: Discussion

5 Minutes: Assignment of Homework and Closing

Reflection:

Humans live in an uncomfortable state of incompleteness. We intuitively know that something has gone awry and that we are supposed to be whole, but are instead broken. We crave fullness, but are instead wanting. We desire perfect health and love, but cannot achieve it. Total wholeness is a longed for state, but is always over the next hill or around the next corner. It is as if someone has played a cruel trick, for we have a taste for complete health, but will never experience it. The sense of oneness that we long for is reminiscent of an earlier time.

- Moriarty, 2006

Lies you may have encountered:

1. “You are the only one with problems. No one else has problems in their relationship with God.”
2. “My problems are unique. I am too much of a mess. God can forgive/love others, but not me.”
3. “If you talk about your problems, people will not like you. They will think you are ‘ungodly’.”
4. “It is best to solve your own problems. Do not rely on others. No one wants to be dragged down with you.”

During the group we will seek to find out why we have developed difficulties relating to God as He truly is. This journey will involve letting down some walls and letting others inside. This process will occur slowly. No one is expected to share their deepest issues on the first day. But, as the group continues, it is hoped that the group members will prove to be trustworthy, loving, and accepting. Through this safe environment, real change and growth can take place.

Homework: Week 1

The Struggle:

Before the biblical fall of humankind, Adam and Eve existed in a state of oneness with God. They were one-hundred percent free, uninhibited, and innocent. After the fall, sin entered the world and they became separated from God and, consequently, self-aware. Adam and Eve no longer felt whole and were instead riddled with feeling incomplete.

Gary Moon (1997), in his aptly titled book *Homesick for Eden*, discusses how this fundamental separation leaves us longing for God. He quotes Larry Crabb,

Ever since God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, we have lived in an unnatural environment – a world in which we were not designed to live. We were built to enjoy a garden without weeds, relationships without friction, fellowship without distance. But something is wrong and we know it, both within our world and within ourselves. Deep inside we sense we're out of the nest, always ending the day in a motel room and never at home (p. 11).

As human beings longing for wholeness, we are aware of our need for God. We want to put our faith in something, or more accurately, someone who can fill that “God shaped hole.” At the same time, many of us are left wondering why God has not filled that hole the way we hoped He would. Though we believe God is there with us, it feels like He is nowhere to be found.

Is this in any way similar to your experience? Please explain.

Exercise: God Image Drawing

Please draw a picture of you and God below.

Draw a picture of how you feel you and God look after you have done something wrong.

Take a minute and review the drawings you did for the first exercise. What differences do you notice between the first and the second drawings? How does God respond to you in the first picture? How about the second picture? Do you see any similarities or differences between how you experienced your parents when you did something wrong and how you currently experience God when you do something you regret? Consider your second drawing and write down your responses to the following questions:

1. How is God feeling? _____

2. How are you feeling? _____

3. How close to or distant from God do you feel?

Distant

Close

1 2 3 4 5

Why?

4. If you feel distant, what do you usually do to feel close again?

Week 2

God Image and God Concept

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: The God Image and God Concept

God Image (Heart)

The God Image is the subjective emotional experience of God. It is shaped by our experience of our parents and enables us to continue earlier learned relational patterns (Rizzuto, 1979 & Lawrence, 1997).

“People need a consistent sense of self to feel secure, so they pattern future relationships after what they learned in their relationship with their parents. Their relationship with God is no different. If a child feels he has to be perfect to please his parents, then he will feel he has to be perfect to please God. Conversely, if a child feels he can make mistakes and be accepted by his parents, then he will feel he can make mistakes and be accepted by God” (Moriarty, 2006).

God Concept (Head)

The intellectual, theoretical, mental definition of the word “God” is shaped by religious education and exists more as an abstract concept than an immediate emotional reality (Rizzuto, 1979 & Lawrence, 1997).

“The God concept is the intellectual understanding of God (Lawrence, 1997). It is based on what is taught about God in catechism or Sunday school, Bible studies and sermons. The God concept is an objective and abstract understanding of God. Most individuals reared in the Christian faith have a God concept that is characterized by love, strength, and wisdom” (Moriarty, 2006).

In the drawings we completed for homework last week, the first picture seems to represent the God concept, while the second picture most accurately represents the God image.

Discussion Time

Homework: Week 2: Parent/God Image Grid

Our relationship with our parents shapes the way we experience God. This exercise will help you get a better understanding of this “shaping” process. Check the appropriate squares as you recall how your father related to you when you were young.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY FATHER WAS...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						

Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						
Protective						
Passive						
Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						
Unpredictable						

*Used with permission from Rapha’s 12-Step Program for Overcoming Chemical Dependency (USA: Rapha Publications, 1990 15-33). This exercise is reprinted here with permission from Rapha Publications. You can find more information at www.searchlight.com. Available at this website are important and insightful books from Robert McGee, the author of the Christian classic The Search for Significance.

Evaluation of Your Relationship with Your Father

- What does this inventory tell you about your relationship with your father?

- If you were an objective observer of the type of relationship you have just described, how would you feel about the father?

- How would you feel about the child?

- How would you respond to the father? Please be specific.

- How would you respond to the child? Please be specific.

Now complete the same exercise, but this time evaluate your relationship with your mother.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY MOTHER WAS...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						
Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						
Protective						
Passive						
Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						

Unpredictable						
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Evaluation of Your Relationship with Your Mother

- What does this inventory tell you about your relationship with your mother?

- If you were an objective observer of the type of relationship you have just described, how would you feel about the mother?

- How would you feel about the child?

- How would you respond to the mother? Please be specific.

- How would you respond to the child? Please be specific.

Evaluating Your Relationship with God

We can begin to see how our relationships with our parents have influenced our perception of God when we evaluate our present relationship with God. The following inventory will help you to determine some of your feelings toward God. Because it is subjective, there are no right or wrong answers. To ensure that the test reveals your actual feelings, please follow the instructions carefully.

- Answer openly and honestly. Don't respond from a theological knowledge of God, but from personal experience.
- Don't describe what the relationship ought to be, or what you hope it will be, but what it is right now.

- Some people feel God might be displeased if they give a negative answer. Nothing is further from the truth. God is pleased with our honesty. A foundation of transparency is required for growth to occur.
- Turn each characteristic into a question. For example: To what degree do I really feel that God loves me? To what degree do I really feel that God understands me?

To what degree do I really feel God is...

Characteristics	Always	Very Often	Some-Times	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't know
Gentle						
Stern						
Loving						
Aloof						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Close and Intimate						
Kind						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Supportive						
Interested						
Discipliner						
Gracious						
Harsh						
Wise						
Holy						
Leader						
Provider						
Trustworthy						
Joyful						
Forgiving						
Good						
Cherishing of Me						
Compassionate						
Impatient						
Unreasonable						
Strong						

Protective						
Passive						
Encouraging						
Sensitive						
Just						
Unpredictable						

- What does this exercise tell you about your relationship with your God?

- Are there any differences between what you know (theologically) and how you feel (emotionally) about God? If so, what are they?

Your Father's Influence on Your Relationship with God

Now that we have examined your current relationship with God, let's look at how your relationship with your earthly father has influenced your perception of God. To make a comparison, transfer all of the check marks you made for your own father to the shaded columns on the next page. When you have completed this, transfer the check marks you made which relate to your relationship with God. To make them more obvious, use an "X" for this category. Put them in the white columns in the appropriate places.

Characteristics	Always		Very Often		Some-Times		Hardly Ever		Never		Don't know	
Gentle												
Stern												
Loving												
Aloof												
Disapproving												
Distant												
Close and Intimate												
Kind												
Angry												
Caring												
Demanding												
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Wise												
Holy												
Leader												
Provider												
Trustworthy												
Joyful												
Forgiving												
Good												
Cherishing of Me												
Compassionate												
Impatient												

Unreasonable											
Strong											
Protective											
Passive											
Encouraging											
Sensitive											
Just											
Unpredictable											

- What characteristics are the same for both your father and God?

- Which characteristics are quite different (two or more boxes from each other)?

Your Mother's Influence on Your Relationship with God

How has your mother influenced your perception of God? To make a comparison, transfer all of the check marks you made for your own mother to the shaded columns on the next page. When you have completed this, transfer the check marks you made which relate to your relationship with God. To make them more obvious, use an "X" for this category. Put them in the white columns in the appropriate places.

Characteristics	Always		Very Often		Some-Times		Hardly Ever		Never		Don't know	
Gentle												
Stern												
Loving												
Aloof												
Disapproving												
Distant												
Close and Intimate												
Kind												
Angry												
Caring												
Demanding												
Supportive												
Interested												
Discipliner												
Gracious												
Harsh												
Wise												
Holy												
Leader												
Provider												
Trustworthy												
Joyful												
Forgiving												
Good												
Cherishing of Me												
Compassionate												
Impatient												

Unreasonable											
Strong											
Protective											
Passive											
Encouraging											
Sensitive											
Just											
Unpredictable											

- What characteristics are the same for both your mother and God?

- Which characteristics are quite different (two or more boxes from each other)?

- What patterns (if any) do you see?

- Write a summary paragraph about how your perception of God has been shaped by your relationship with your mother.

Week 3

How did the God Image develop?

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: My parents, My hurts, and My God Image

Before we begin let me first warn you that the following discussion can be frightening because it breaks one of the main rules: “Never say anything negative about your parents.” This is uncomfortable, but necessary to overcoming emotional difficulties. All parents are imperfect; some are good, others are average, and some are poor. Because we live in a fallen world, all parents are limited in their ability to love their children, and therefore all parents wound their children in some way or another.

Problems with parents can run the gamut. You may have had parents that clearly loved you, but were not as emotionally available as you needed them to be. Maybe you were sure that they valued you, but they would spend long hours working. Perhaps you had a parent who was too depressed to be there for you. Maybe you had an alcoholic parent that you had to distract, so he or she would not harm your siblings. Whatever the situation, we all had different parents who experienced different limitations. These limitations cause different problems, among the most common are perfectionism, worthlessness, guilt, and fear of abandonment.

Discussion:

What has been the message behind the wounds you have experienced?

How has this message affected your relationship with God?

How do you believe the real God would address these hurts if He were to speak to them right now? Please take a few minutes and write in the space provided what you believe He would say to you (speak from His point of view).

Group Exercise:

Often individuals who have felt worthless, guilty, or fearful in their relationship with God are freely able to give God’s grace, love, and mercy to others. There seems to be this lie that somehow convinces us that we are in some way or another “unique” or God would not want to love us like He loves everyone else.

Let’s go around in a circle and encourage the person next to us as we believe the real God would encourage them (again, speak from God’s point of view). What would the real God want your brother or sister to know about his/her fear?

Homework: Week 3

Please read the following: “How did your God Image Develop?”

The God Image is not something that just appears once you start thinking about God; rather, it is something that is with you from early childhood and something that stays with you throughout all the twists and turns of your life. It can be tempting to think of it as a fixed idea that exists, untouched, in the corner of your soul. This is misleading because it is actually a fluid emotional concept that changes along with your growing personality.

To get a better picture of how this occurs, let's turn back the clock and go back to your earliest years to see how your God Image has developed. In fact, let's begin with your parents, before you were even born, when you were just a twinkle in your mother's eye. If you are a parent, then you know what it is like to learn that you or your partner is expecting. Depending on your situation, this news can be greeted with joy, regret, or ambivalence. Try to think back to what you can remember about the circumstances that surrounded your birth.

Maybe you were planned or perhaps you were unexpected. Maybe you were warmly received, but worried about. Perhaps you do not know your parents or maybe you choose to forget them. Regardless of your situation, your parents significantly impacted you. They brought you into this world and provided you with the raw material you needed to adapt and grow into the person you are.

One thing that your parents did that influenced your identity is that they named you. The process of picking a name is a very meaningful ritual that shaped the way your parents saw you. I do not even have kids, but I already have favorite names picked out. Attached to those names are preconceived ideas of who we expect our children to be. Likewise, your parents had an idea of who you would be and that is what is symbolized in the name they chose for you.

Some parents are better than others at giving up these preconceived notions. You may have seen parents who refuse to give up their ideas of who their children should be. These parents do not realize what kind of harm they are doing. They influence their children to forsake their natural strivings and instead conform to what they want. If this happened to you, then you may have the sense that “who you are” is not “who God wants

you to be.” You may sense that your natural interests are wrong and that you instead have to fit into an ideal that God expects you to meet.

The early childhood factor that influenced the formation of your God image the most is your relationship with your chief caregiver. This was the person who was most responsible for your development as a child. That person is usually your mother but it could have been your father, grandmother, aunt, or friend. To simplify, I will refer to the chief caregiver as “mother,” but feel free to insert the name of someone else who may have played this role in your life.

The relationship between you and your mother did more than any other relationship in shaping your personality. You were completely dependent upon her and naturally stayed closely connected to her. Harry Stack Sullivan observed that long after the physical umbilical cord is cut, the emotional umbilical cord remains fully connected. What your mother felt, you felt. What she feared, you feared. What she loved, you loved. You did not know the exact nature of the things that she loved and feared, but you picked up on and experienced her feelings about those things.

The attachment between you and your mother provided the foundation upon which your idea of yourself, others, and God was built. This bond became the backdrop of your life; the ground from which your understanding of existence emerged. Erik Erikson suggested that this early experience taught you to either fundamentally trust the world or to fundamentally mistrust the world. If you sensed that your mother loved and accepted you, then you learned that others and God could be trusted. If you did not feel loved and accepted, then you may have difficulty trusting others and God.

The degree of trust that you developed also influenced the extent to which you could separate from your mother. All children have a drive to become their own person. This is technically referred to as the separation-individuation process and includes the terrible two’s— when children learn to assert themselves and say “no.” If you felt safe and like your mother could take care of herself, then you probably honored the drive to individuate from your mother. On the other hand, if you did not feel safe, then you probably stayed close to your mother and stunted your drive toward growth.

This stage can have a strong influence on your personal relationship with God. If you felt like your mother wanted you to psychologically grow and separate, then you probably experience God as mature and giving. If you felt that your mother did not want you to

grow, then you may experience God as immature or needy. You may not even be conscious of this process, but have a vague sense that if you grow too much or become too independent, then God will withdraw from you. Some people report wanting to pursue a dream, but fear that it is not God's will. They tend to be overly focused on following God's plan for their life even though they are not sure what that plan is. If you struggle with this, then you may sense that you are eternally waiting for direction from God. You may be afraid to make any bold moves, just in case they are not in line with God's will.

The next phase you entered, between the ages of 3 and 4, is the transitional stage. This is marked by the development of the imagination. In a short period of time your internal world became populated with a variety of fantastic creatures. Elves, witches, monsters, and superheroes are some of the more popular ones. You utilized these imaginary creatures to help you adapt and cope with the pressures you encountered in your world. At that time in your life, God was officially introduced to you.

It did not take you long to figure out that God was not like the other creatures that populated your mind (Rizzuto, 1979). Instead, God was taken seriously. Parents spoke sternly about God, visited God's house, and met with God's representatives. With this information, you began to shape your image of God. From the behavior of adults and environmental cues, you realized that God is in charge of everything, is all-powerful, and all-knowing. You only knew two other people like that: Mom and Dad. Out of necessity, you crafted your God Image in the likeness of your parents. If your relationship with your parents was healthy, then your God Image was healthy. If your relationship with your parents was unhealthy, then your God image was unhealthy.

This developmental time is also marked by the discovery of a special object. The blanket that Linus, the Peanuts character, carried with him is a popular example. This object can take on a variety of forms, but is usually a stuffed animal, toy, or blanket. It is known as a transitional object; because it helped you transition away from your caregivers and to a more independent state. It represented your mother and enabled you to soothe yourself by reducing your anxiety.

The object exists in what Donald Winnicott termed transitional space. That is, it exists between the external world and the internal world; it is not completely objective or completely subjective. Instead, it incorporates aspects of the two.

To illustrate this concept to my students, I bring in a sharpei (i.e., the overly wrinkly looking dog) stuffed animal, affectionately known as "Beans." I pass Beans around the

class and ask each of the students to get an idea as to how Beans is feeling. Beans has a neutral face; that is, he doesn't look happy or sad. His neutrality makes it easy for my students to project whatever they are feeling onto him. After all of them have finished looking at Beans I have them volunteer how they perceived Beans was feeling. Each student offers a different response, which usually corresponds to his or her particular mood.

Beans is a good transitional object because he is external (outside the self – not purely subjective or imaginary) and internal – each of us is allowed to project our own feelings onto him. Doing this makes him special to each of us and allows us to experience him in whatever way we need to.

Just as my students projected their feelings onto Beans, you projected your feelings onto your transitional object. Engaging in this process allowed you to separate from your mother and it also provided you with a template to further develop your God Image. The God Image is a special type of transitional object, because it is not completely objective or completely subjective. That is, it exists both inside and outside of you at the same time. For example, most of us agree that God exists and is external, but each of us perceives God internally in a different manner. This allows our idea of God to be validated by others because it exists outside the self and, at the same time, to be personally meaningful because it is experienced inside the self.

After the close of the transitional stage, your God Image was continually shaped by your curiosity. You likely asked a number of questions, including “Who made the sky? Where does God live? How old is God? Does God cry?” At that period, you also believed that your parents knew everything that you did and all of your thoughts. This belief was also translated to God.

The next stage of development is the Oedipal phase. This occurs between the ages of 4 to 6 and is marked by intense feelings for the parent of the opposite sex. If you grew up in a healthy family, then you probably navigated this conflict with success and gradually concluded that you could not have your parent all to yourself. This was a great loss, but instead of facing this reality entirely, you unconsciously transferred all of your feelings over to the parent of the same sex. Eventually, you concluded that you could not have this parent all to yourself either. At that point, you began to see your parents from a more objective stance. Also, at that time, a conscious differentiation between parents and God

occurred. You then knew that your parents could not “hear” your internal dialogue, but you knew God still could (Rizzuto, 1979).

If you grew up in a dysfunctional family, then you probably had a more difficult time with this conflict. Your fundamental needs may have not been satisfactorily met. As a result, you may have sought out others to try to complete yourself. As you moved into adolescence, you may have attempted to lock onto your God Image to satisfy this deep longing. Your relationship with God may have been “highly charged,” but still unable to meet your inner needs.

Whether you successfully resolved this conflict or not, the God Image continued to change with your growing personality. The dawn of puberty signaled the onset of your ability to think abstractly, which in turn influenced the way you thought about God. The God image is also impacted by other life transitions. For example, moving into early adulthood probably caused you to become more responsible and change the way you saw yourself and others. As you passed through each stage in life, you changed your God Image to keep it consistent with your self-perception.

The way you see yourself is very powerful and influences the way you emotionally experience God. Benson and Spilka (1973) discovered that individuals with high self-esteem had a positive God Image, whereas those with low self-esteem had a negative God Image. If people have a high self-esteem, then it is likely they will feel God loves them. If they have a low self-esteem, then it is likely they will feel that God does not love them. The results of this study make intuitive sense. Think about it. How often do you find people who think they are a complete failure, convinced that God is absolutely crazy about them? On the other hand, how often do you find people who have a high self-esteem convinced that God regrets creating them? These situations are abnormal. They usually do not happen. The reason they do not happen is because people’s idea of self and idea of how God feels about them are usually consistent. These are similar because the self has a natural tendency toward maintaining consistency. When the self changes, the God Image will change along with it.

Michael Boivin (2003) has written a fascinating article entitled Finding God in Prozac or Finding Prozac in God. He discusses the role that this anti-depressant has played in changing the self and God Image of religious individuals. These individuals prayed, read scriptures, and used other spiritual disciplines, but did not experience relief from depression or an increase in their experience of God’s love. Like psychotherapy, Prozac affected the self of these individuals, resulting in a decrease of depressive symptoms and

an increase in their spiritual walk with God. In writing about Prozac, Boivin (2002) states, “[it is] not that it can enhance emotional or psychological well-being where prayer did not; rather that it reveals to us more than ever just how interwoven the biochemistry of the brain is to who we are and how we relate to each other and to God” (p. 161).

To sum up, the God Image developed along with your growing personality. Many important aspects of the formation of the God Image occurred early in your life. Through this time, via the relationship with your parents, you came to a number of conclusions about God.

The first is whether or not God can be trusted. The second is whether or not God wanted you to grow. These early experiences set the foundation of your God Image, but it continued to change along with your personality, particularly during times of transition and change. This is explained by the close relationship between your sense of self and God Image. If you feel positive about yourself then you probably feel that God accepts you. If you feel negative about yourself, then you may sometimes feel rejected by God.

Reflection Questions:

What parts of the God image development process do you most identify with?

What really stands out to you?

Please pick a hymn you have found encouraging in the past and read it each day this week in the morning and in the evening.

Name of Hymn: _____

Week 4

God Image, Christianity, and the Cognitive Map

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: How does the God Image relate to Christianity?

As human beings longing for wholeness, we are aware of the need for God. We want to put our faith in something, or more accurately, someone who can fill that “God shaped hole.”

In a perfect world the God Image and the true God would be one and the same. Unfortunately, this is not the case and we often tune into negative messages from our internal critical parents and attribute them to the true God. I believe God has made parents imperfect, so that we would be motivated to search out Someone who is perfect (White, 1984). I also believe that God communicates with us through our own God Image. I see the process of therapy as a means by which the God Image is changed to be a better, and more accurate, receiver of God’s love. The God Image is like a filter that has to be cleaned so that we can experience God in a more accurate manner. It can also be seen as an antennae, or satellite dish, that often times picks up our parents’ voices and it needs to be adjusted so that we can more clearly hear God’s voice.

Maps for the Journey

Have you ever left on a trip and become lost along the way? If you have a map, then this situation can be quickly resolved. A map is helpful because it gives you a bigger picture and allows you to see where you have taken a wrong turn. Once you locate yourself, you can then take steps to get back on the right track.

An atlas is helpful, but what about a chart that helps you find your way when you are lost on your life journey? Well, just as there are people who create roadmaps, there are psychologists who create life-maps. These maps are based on different types of research and psychological theory.

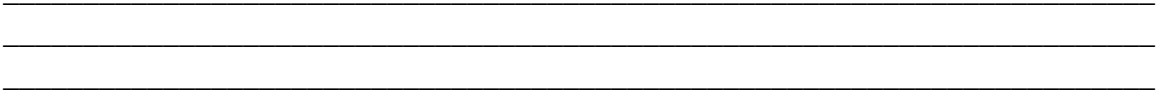
The map that we will be working with is called the cognitive map. The goal is for you to orient yourself to this, so that you have a better understanding of how your emotional hurts developed. These descriptions will show you how the route you took through life has impacted your God image. Once you are aware of the path you have taken, you will be in a better position to head-out in a new, and healing, direction.

Group Exercise: The Cognitive Map

Thoughts are extremely powerful in changing the way we feel. To illustrate this, allow yourself to engage in this brief exercise.

Recall something that you regret doing – something that was moderately emotionally painful. Shut your eyes and re-imagine the event for approximately 30 seconds, then stop (Beck, 1979).

How do you feel? Jot down a few words describing how you feel.



Week 5

Cognitive Techniques

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: Review of Cognitive Theory

As we discussed last week, cognitive therapy changes the way that people think in order to change the way that they feel. The basic premise underlying cognitive theory is that there is a crucial connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Each of us has many different thoughts that occur to us throughout the day; a thought occurs that triggers a certain feeling or mood, which subsequently triggers a behavior.

Thoughts→Feelings→Behavior

Cognitive theorists break problematic ways of thinking down into three main components.

The first is automatic thoughts.

The second examines cognitive errors.

The third involves core beliefs.

Automatic thoughts are defined as “thoughts or visual images individuals may be unaware of unless attention is purposely focused on them” (Beck et. al. 1979, p. 187). They further elucidate that automatic thoughts have specific criterial attributes.

- (1) They are automatic – they occur as if by reflex, without prior reasoning;
- (2) They are unreasonable and dysfunctional;
- (3) They seem completely plausible and are uncritically accepted as valid even though they seem bizarre upon reflection;

(4) They are involuntary (Beck et. al., 1979, p. 166).

God Image Automatic Thought Record

A variety of interventions are used to change negative, irrational patterns of thinking. We will work through one today called the God Image Automatic Thought Record. The goal is to uncover and then change the automatic thoughts through utilizing the God Image Automatic Thought Record – GIATR (see below). Take 15 minutes at the end of each day and think of specific events that caused you to feel God’s disappointment, anger, frustration, etc. Initially just fill out the first three columns: Situation, Degree of Emotion, and Irrational God Image Automatic Thought. After you have mastered this, answer your Irrational God Image Automatic Thought under the fourth column, which is the Real God Response. You can craft the Real God Response by drawing on your understanding of scripture and faith. Then rate the percentage (0 to 100%) of belief in the Rational God Response. In the final column, rate the degree of emotion after thinking about the Real God Response.

This technique will encourage you to dispute the Irrational God Image Automatic Thoughts by questioning whether the thoughts come from the God of Christianity or the God of internal parents or self-esteem. Each time you differentiate, you will be made more aware and more able to change your thoughts from ones that are irrational to ones that are rational. This will also help you own your thoughts. Instead of seeing thoughts as foreign intrusions from a punitive deity, you may learn that the thoughts are self-imposed and consequently can be self-controlled.

To further illustrate how this technique works, consider Bob. Bob has a number of automatic thoughts that caused him to feel worthless and experience God as rejecting. I used this tool to help Bob identify and change these thoughts. His thoughts are recorded on his GIATR below. I have included an additional, blank, GIATR for your use.

Life Example: Bob

Bob is a 37-year old clergy person who is depressed and feels like he cannot win God’s approval or acceptance. He grew up with a father who abused alcohol and was extremely critical and rejecting of him. His mother was passive and failed to protect him from his father’s painful insults. Bob blamed himself for his problems with his father and thought it was his responsibility to mend their relationship. This, despite Bob’s efforts, never

happened. In his early adult years, Bob married his wife, Joan. He described their marriage as “okay,” but referred to himself as a “terrible” husband. Shortly after marrying, Bob went into seminary and gained a solid theological understanding of the faith.

In seminary, Bob learned of a loving and accepting God, but these beliefs were stuck in his head and never made it to his heart. The God he cognitively understood was different from the God he emotionally experienced. The God he experienced seemed much more personal, real and alive to him than the God he learned about in seminary. This God was felt and immediate, whereas the Christian God was abstract and removed. The hurtful God’s edicts were automatically convincing, whereas the real God’s tenants were ideas he had to deliberately think about to believe. Ironically, it seemed natural and easier to believe in this false and painful God, than it was to believe in the true and healing real God.

This belief in the false God occurred effortlessly, because it resembled his relationship with his father. Bob often felt like he fell short and like he could have done better. As a result, he felt he deserved the harsh judgments and negative criticism he received from his harmful God Image. He evaluated his performances and concluded that he could be a more loving husband, could be a more available pastor and could be a better Christian. Because Bob did not do these things perfectly, in his mind, he felt justifiably disapproved of.

Bob’s God Image was a taskmaster that expected more from Bob than he could realistically give. As a result, Bob usually felt guilty and like he should have accomplished more. As one might guess, the idea of taking personal time was something that his brain could not compute. If he did take the morning off, then he would feel crippled with guilt and would not find relief until he made it into the office.

His God Image also shared similarities with his relationship with his mother. Bob could not approach his God with concerns or complaints for fear that bringing up less than positive things would result in emotional abandonment. Bob, as a young child, got the message that he was to keep a smiling face on despite his pain. He transferred this to his God Image and, as a result, did not feel comfortable approaching God with painful issues or complaints about situations he did not understand. Instead, Bob felt it was his job to manage these burdens on his own.

Bob’s God was not one of one of unmerited grace, but one of earned salvation. You had to perform to win a pat on the back. Bob would do his best to live a clean and holy life,

but, like all of us, would inevitably “slip up.” This God that tolerated him when he was close to perfect, became angry and shaming whenever Bob missed the mark. At these times, he sensed God’s displeasure and felt like he had to earn his way back into His good graces. Bob would repent and spend lengthy amounts of time in prayer to prove that he was sorry. He would try his hardest not to slip up again. After about 2 weeks of prayer and worship, Bob would feel welcomed back again by God. Unfortunately, it was only a matter of time till he did something he regretted and would then once again find himself feeling rejected and ashamed for what he had done – disgusted with himself for failing once again.

Bob's God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>
<p>I didn't prepare adequately for that sermon. As a result, it fell flat and did not get a very good response.</p>	<p>Worthless 95</p>	<p>God Image Response: "You are a joke as a pastor. You cannot even take time to craft a decent sermon. You are an embarrassment to me." 85%</p>	<p>"Bob, I do not judge you based on your performance. I love you and am proud to be your Father. You are finite and cannot always give 100%, often times you have to accept a less than perfect job."</p>	<p>40% Belief in God Image Irrational Response 50-Degree of Feeling Worthless</p>
<p>I was sitting in a restaurant and had a lustful thought when I was</p>	<p>Shameful 98</p>	<p>God Image Response: "What is wrong with you? You are a</p>	<p>"Bob, I hear you asking for forgiveness and want you to know that I</p>	<p>43% Belief in God Image Irrational Response 55-Degree of</p>

looking at an attractive woman.		pastor, but a complete mess. You will never make progress in this area.” 88%	accept you and want to help you with these issues. You do not have to be ashamed or hide things from me. I love you.”	Feeling Shameful
I waited at the door to meet the new church family, but they ignored me and left in a hurry.	Rejected 70	God Image Response: “You did a poor job leading the service. No wonder they did not want to talk to you. They will never come back.” 65%	“Bob, I will never leave you or abandon you. My presence in your life is not dependent on how well the church members like you.”	35% Belief in God Image Irrational Response 25-Degree of Feeling Rejected

Group exercise: Have one member of the group work through a God Image Automatic Thought Record in the session.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

Homework: Week 5

- Complete 3 different entries on the God Image Automatic Thought Records on the following pages.
- This week instead of just reading a hymn in the morning and the evening, sing the hymn several times a day including morning and evening.
- Set up a meeting with one of your fellow group members to work through a GIATR.
- To read some common cognitive errors, please view the list below.

Common Cognitive Errors:

1. Over-generalizing: Drawing sweeping inferences (e.g., “I can’t control my temper”) from a single instance.
2. Discounting the positives: Deciding that if a good thing has happened, it couldn’t have been very important.
3. Jumping to conclusions: Focusing on one aspect of a situation in deciding how to understand it (e.g., “The reason I haven’t received a phone call from the job I applied to is that they have decided not to offer it to me”).
4. Mind reading: Believing one knows what another person is thinking, with very little evidence.
5. Fortune telling: Believing one knows what the future holds, while ignoring other possibilities.
6. Magnifying/minimizing: Evaluating the importance of a negative event, or the lack of importance of a positive event, in a distorted manner.
7. Emotional reasoning: Believing that something must be true, because it feels like it is true.
8. Making “should” statements: Telling oneself one should do (or should have done) something, when it is more accurate to say that one would like to do (or wishes one had done) the preferred thing.
9. Labeling: Using a label (“bad mother,” “idiot”) to describe behavior, and then imputing all the meanings the label carries.

10. Inappropriate blaming: using hindsight to determine what one “should have done,” even if one could not have known the best thing to do at the time; ignoring mitigating factors; or ignoring the roles played by others in determining a negative outcome.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God’s disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

Week 6

Cognitive Distortions

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: Cognitive Distortions

At times our thinking is not as accurate as we “think” it is. Researchers in psychology have found several cognitive distortions that humans are prone to engage in. Below is a description of the three most common cognitive distortions and ways to fight them.

Filtering

Filtering occurs when a person filters out the positive and looks only at the negative. Filtering also happens when a person’s God image focuses on their weaknesses and mistakes rather than their strengths and victories. Solution – Shift the focus. Example – Bob’s God Image was emphasizing what Bob thought was a poor sermon. Bob switched the focus to the other things that went well and prayed about those events.

Over-generalizations

Bob’s God Image told him he was a “complete mess” for having a lustful thought and that he would “never make progress” in that area. Solution – Quantify. Bob realized he had unhealthy sexual thoughts about 20% of the time and healthy sexual thoughts 80% of the time. He also realized that he was more able to challenge and change his unhealthy sexual thoughts. Bob was making progress and was not a complete mess in this area.

Discussion:

Are there any problem areas of your life where you see yourself failing in ways you feel God is not proud of?

What percent of the time are you actually engaging in these activities?

What percent of the time are you not engaging in these problem areas, but are rather engaging in healthy activity?

Catastrophizing

This occurs when your thoughts snowball (e.g., “I got a C, I’m going to fail out of the program”). After Bob argued with his wife, his God Image told him, “You are a failure as a husband and you are going to get divorced. If you cannot manage your family, how can you expect to guide your congregation?” Solution – Ask, “What are the odds?” Bob and his wife had overcome many difficulties and there was little chance that they would get divorced. An outside observer would not bet against them.

Discussion:

What are some areas of your life where you believe you may have catastrophized a situation?

What are the chances that this situation would actually come true?

How is everyone doing in the process? Where are some areas of pain (painful thinking/emotions) still present?

Homework: Week 6

- Meet with a fellow group member this week. Help each other choose a second meaningful hymn/spiritual song based on areas of desired growth. Then sing that hymn along with your other chosen song twice a day (morning and evening).

Please write the name of your second selected hymn here: _____

- Please begin reading *The Horse and His Boy*. This reading needs to be completed by session 8.
- Complete 3 more God Image Automatic Thought Records.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.
	Rate 0-100.	Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

Week 7

Negative Core Beliefs or Schemas

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Education Component: Schemas and God Image

Schemas

Schemas are the core beliefs that maintain a person's negative thinking. Most depressive schemas, or underlying depressive assumptions, are unknown to clients because they are too "deep" (Beck et. al., 1979). That is, they are too close to the self to be immediately observed. One can find their core beliefs through looking for themes in their automatic thoughts. Certain groups or automatic thoughts will fit together and from them a certain theme will emerge. That is, they will share an underlying common denominator. Most core beliefs are vague and are marked by global words like dumb, stupid, ugly, or worthless. They are also sometimes stated in "if-then" propositions, "If I am not competent, then I'm a failure" (DeRubeis, Tang, & Beck, 2001, p. 76). Beck (1976) recorded some of the more popular schemas:

1. In order to be happy, I have to be successful in whatever I undertake.
2. To be happy, I must be accepted (like, admired) by all people at all times.
3. If I'm not on top, I'm a flop.
4. It's wonderful to be popular, famous, wealthy; it's terrible to be unpopular, mediocre.
5. If I make a mistake, then it means I'm inept.
6. My value as a person depends on what others think of me.
7. I can't live without love. If my spouse/significant other doesn't love me, then I'm worthless.

8. If somebody disagrees with me, it means he doesn't like me.
9. If I don't take advantage of every opportunity to advance myself, I will regret it later.

Schemas and the God Image

Schemas also influence the way that we experience God. The core beliefs we hold are often reflected in our God Image. For example, Bob felt he had to be stellar in every area of ministry to be acceptable. His God Image paralleled this pattern of thinking by expecting him to perform perfectly in every area of ministry. When Bob inevitably failed, he rejected himself and consequently also felt rejected by his God Image.

One way to change a harmful God image schema is to identify and then renegotiate personal agreements with God (Beck et. al., 1979).

Group Exercise:

1. First, ask yourself what you must do to win God's approval. Would this involve being perfect, always doing what God wants you to do, or something completely other? Take your time with this. Write down a couple ways that you believe you could win God's approval.

2. Secondly, once this is identified, it is helpful to look at it and see if it is valid or even feasible to fulfill. Rewrite the ways you identified to win God's approval and next to them write on a scale from 1-10 how able you feel you are to complete these tasks. A "1" would be "I cannot complete these things at all." A "10" would be "I am perfectly able to complete these tasks."

3. Next, think about when you originally made this agreement (i.e. childhood, last year, just today). Often these agreements were originally made when we were children, but nonetheless affect our adult lives today. Spend some time and think about when these thoughts on how to win God's approval had entered your life. What was going on in your life at that time?

4. Are these beliefs realistic? Do you currently believe that you are able to win God's approval in such ways? If not, what must an individual do to earn God's approval? Write a new agreement that is realistic and based on your current understanding of Christianity. Make sure this new agreement is clear, specific and rational, and includes room for failures, missteps, and continued growth. Spend some time thinking about what this would look like and then write it in the space provided below.

Homework: Week 7

- Please complete The Horse and His Boy the next group session.
- Continue singing the hymns—you may add or change hymns at any time.
- Continue combating irrational thinking through completing the God Image Automatic Thought Records.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc. Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s). Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s). Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%. Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

Week 8

Bibliotherapy

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component: What is bibliotherapy and how does it work?

Reading Christian fantasy can also be helpful in changing the God image. Christian fantasy brings people into a realm of childlike thought and leaves behind adult-rational thought. Reading books such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, can lead people through an emotional experience. This process can alter the God Image by enabling you to identify with characters that relate to Aslan (i.e., God). Through this passive identification, many people vicariously experience God's forgiveness, grace and love. These healing images can be very powerful and serve as excellent reminders of God's true nature when your God Image is particularly harsh and judgmental.

Reading popular religious works, such as *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, *Basic Christianity* by John Stott, and *Your God is Too Small* by J.B. Phillips, may help you begin to understand more about the Christian faith at an affective (emotional) level. As you gain more understanding, theology can be further demystified by recommending a simple systematic theology. Through reading these books, you may clarify your beliefs and be better equipped to dispute your irrational thoughts.

Film Clip and Discussion

Homework: Week 8

- Continue completing God Image Automatic Thought Records.
- Continue singing the hymns or worship music.
- Bring a word of encouragement for each group member next week.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment	Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.	Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).	Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).	Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.
	Rate 0-100.	Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.	Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.	Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.

God Image Automatic Thought Record

<p>Situation Actual event leading to feeling God's disappointment</p>	<p>Feelings Specify sad, anxious, angry, etc.</p> <p>Rate 0-100.</p>	<p>Automatic Thought(s) Write irrational God Image automatic thought(s) that preceded emotion(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in irrational God Image thought(s), 0-100%.</p>	<p>Real God Response (Drawing on your own experience of prayer and scripture) Write real God response to irrational God Image automatic thought(s).</p> <p>Rate belief in real God response, 0-100%.</p>	<p>Outcome Re-rate belief in irrational God Image automatic thought(s), 0-100%.</p> <p>Specify and rate subsequent feelings, 0-100.</p>

Week 9
Recap and Goodbyes

Welcome and Icebreaker

Discussion of Homework

Educational Component:

Overview of group.

Discussion and Closing

Post Tests

APPENDIX M: God Image Group 2
Spiritual Life Group
Group Leader Manual

By

Jacqueline Rasar

Doctoral Candidate

Week 1

Spiritual Life Group Introduction

Welcome and Introductions

Group Ground Rules:

1. All group members will be ready to start group on time at each session.
2. All group members will be respectful toward the other members of the group.
3. All group members are responsible to do the weekly homework. If any group member does not complete his or her homework more than twice, he or she will be asked to leave the group.
4. All group members will listen to other group members and not monopolize the time.

Format for each group:

Total Group Time: 55 minutes

5 Minutes: Welcome and Icebreaker

15 Minutes: Discussion of Previous Week and Homework

15 Minutes: Prayer Time

15 Minutes: Bible Study

5 Minutes: Assignment of Homework and Closing

Discuss the direction of the group

Read Psalm 8

Psalm 8

New International Version

A psalm of David

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Introduction to Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the book of Psalms. It speaks to the glory of God and the condescension of God for mankind's behalf. This psalm provides "a commanding vision of the Sovereign God and the created universe and his unfathomable care for humanity" (Wilson, 2002, p. 199).

Four parts of the Psalm (Craigie, 1983):

1. God's majesty and might
2. Mankind's sense of insignificance
3. God's role for mankind
4. Concluding Praise

Read Verse 1

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

Reflections from verse 1:

God has made himself known to humanity and creation. He set his own glory on display. The word glory describes the essence of God—who he really is at his core. The public presence of God is impressive, awe-inspiring, and intimidating (Wilson, 2002). God was sovereign before the creation of the world, so his glory is above the heavens. The psalm opens with the phrase "O LORD, our Lord." The first Hebrew word is Yahweh, and the second Hebrew word is Adonai. There are rich meanings behind these names of God. As Adonai God is master and the sovereign Lord. He certainly is worthy of all praise.

Discussion Questions:

I mentioned above that the glory of God is impressive, awe-inspiring, and intimidating. How else can the glory of God be described?

How have you experienced the glory of God in your own life?

What are some displays of God's glory in the created world?

Closing Prayer

Week 1: Homework

Read Psalm 8 every day this week

Psalm 8

New International Version

A psalm of David

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Memorize Verse 1

Write Psalm 8:1 in the space provided

What is one of your favorite praise songs?

Listen to this song three times this week.

Write the lyrics to your favorite verse of this song below.

Week 2

“The Weapon of Praise”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Each week we will take the first five minutes of group time by going around the circle and sharing one high point and one low point from the previous week. The purpose of this activity is to connect with each other and get the conversations flowing. Please come prepared to the remaining groups with your high and low. Take a few minutes now and think about what you would like to share. (If this becomes a lengthy process, consider asking 3 or 4 group members to share their high/low rather than each member).

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

What praise song did you select and why?

Ask one or two participants to quote Psalm 8:1.

Prayer Time:

Have each participant select two mission field prayer cards.

Discuss the need to prayer for the work of God around the world.

Pray silently for the needs expressed on the prayer cards.

Ask for a volunteer to close the prayer time.

Read Psalm 8

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Bible Study:

Psalm 8:2

From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

Reflections from verse 2:

God chooses to use the weak of this world—children and infants—to establish his strength. Recognizing your own weakness is the first step in putting God in his rightful place. The enemies are any forces that do not recognize the name of God. Since the beginning, God has been in the business of silencing his enemies and proving his sovereignty. This is an ongoing process until God brings them to an ultimate end. Isn't it interesting that God uses praise to silence the enemy?

Discussion Questions:

How did God use the following people to establish his own strength?

David

Jesus (He is the ultimate example of the weak confounding the mighty!)

The Apostles

Why were each of these people considered weak?

What are some of your weaknesses?

How can God use them?

How would you answer someone who believes God has left the world because of the ongoing presence of evil?

Have you ever had difficulty trusting God because of the presence of evil? Please explain.

Closing

Week 2: Homework

Memorize verse 2

Write Psalm 8:1-2 in the space provided.

Find an article in a newspaper or magazine that speaks to an injustice in the world today.

Read the article and bring it to group next week to discuss.

Write three reflections from the article.

- 1.

- 2.

3. _____

Week 3

”For Your Consideration”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Ask a few group members to recite Psalm 8:1-2.

Discuss the article assignment. Ask a few participants to summarize their selected article.

How would you answer someone in this situation from the Christian worldview?

Prayer Time:

Use this time to pray for the administration, faculty, staff, and students at Free Will Baptist Bible College (FWBBC). Also, pray for the future of the institution. Ask for two volunteers to pray out loud.

Bible Study:

Ask for a volunteer to read Psalm 8.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from verse 3:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

The glory of God is above the heavens; therefore the psalmist begins with the heavens to praise the creative power of God. The size of the cosmos gives us a glimpse at the majesty of God. To think about the creation of the universe as the work of God's fingers leads one to view creation as displays of artistry and ease as God firmly established the elements of creation (Goldingay, 2006).

Isaiah 40:25-26 is another good passage that speaks to God's creative power.

“To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens;
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one,
And calls them each by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
Not one of them is missing.

Discussion Questions:

What is the most amazing part of creation that you have witnessed? Describe your experience.

What parts of creation help to convince you that the earth and the universe were made by an intelligent God? Where do you see the design and order God has set in place? Does what you see strengthen your faith? How?

Closing

Week 3: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8: 3.

Write Psalm 8:1-3 in the space provided.

Log on to www.youtube.com

Search “size of the universe”

Watch a few of the videos on this topic.

Week 4

“What is Man?”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Ask one participant to quote Psalm 8:1-3

What did you learn about the size of the universe?

Would one or two of you like to share your prayer of praise to God or describe your nature walk experience to the group?

Prayer Time:

Pray for your family members. Have the group divide into pairs in order to share some personal family needs and pray in pairs.

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8 corporately as a group.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:4:

What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

You might be wondering, if the majesty of God is wrapped up in the cosmos, how can I expect God to care for a mere human being like me? The author of Ecclesiastes wrote a similar lament. “Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow” (Ecc. 1:4, 11, NIV). The answer to these questions is in the following phrase. God cares for mankind. Psalm 8 is not about human insignificance, but rather, it is about “divine grace, empowerment, and resultant human responsibility” (Wilson, 2002, p. 205). God is mindful of you!

Discussion Questions:

Have you ever wondered if God cares for you? Please share a time when you lamented like the author of Ecclesiastes or the Psalmist.

When have you felt most cared for by God? What words describe how you felt?

Closing

Week 4: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:4.

Please write Psalm 8:1-4 in the space provided.

You have opportunities each day to extend care to others in order to thank God for the care He has shown to you and to glorify God's name. Make an attempt each day this week to care for someone through an act of kindness.

Document your acts below.

Week 5

“Crowned for Service”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Ask one volunteer to quote Psalm 8:1-4 from memory.

Discuss the acts of kindness performed the previous week. What lessons did you learn from the acts of intentional care for others?

Prayer time:

Ask each group member to share a praise item.

Ask for a volunteer to pray a prayer of praise.

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:5:

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

People are not divine, but they are blessed. To be crowned is to share a bit in the honor and glory of God. This crowning is not meant to lead to arrogance, but rather to service. In the account of creation in Genesis, we learn that humans are the only elements of creation in the image of God. This is the highest honor. The implication here is that humans have a unique relationship with the creator—an image bearer with an outward appearance of weakness (Wilson, 2002). You have value!

Discussion Questions:

What does it mean to be created in the “image of God?”

What are some gifts or talents or abilities you have that let you know God created you with special care?

What are some gifts or talents or abilities of the person seated next to you?

What are some practical ways you can demonstrate that every person has value? What difference does or could this make in your ministry to others?

Closing

Week 5: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:5.

Write Psalm 8:1-5 in the space provided.

Psalm 8:5 speaks to the blessings of God. Write ten blessings in your life you have received in the last year, ten blessings from the past week, and ten blessings from today. Do not repeat a blessing.

The past year...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

The past week...

11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Today...

21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____
26. _____
27. _____
28. _____
29. _____
30. _____

Week 6

“Exercising Dominion”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Ask two participants to quote Psalm 8:1-5

Go around the circle and ask each participant to share one blessing from each list, for a total of three from each person. Talk about the nature and scope of these named blessings as a group.

Prayer time- the group process

Pray for the group process. Ask participants to share how the group has been going from their perspectives.

The group leader prays out loud.

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:6:

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

This verse speaks to the command of God for humans to have dominion over creation. This command is a great responsibility. People are also a part of the created order, and are therefore dependent on the sustaining power of God and his mercy. In this verse, the earth rests under the feet of the elevated humans. This superiority does not indicate human power. It is another reference to human responsibility.

Discussion Questions:

What have you been taught about the command to have dominion over the earth in the past?

The “Go Green” movement is often criticized by Christians. How do you respond to this movement? After all, we are to care for the earth.

Closing

Week 6: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:6.

Please write Psalm 8:1-6 in the space provided.

After reflecting on the group discussion about the “Go Green” movement, write at least three ways you can honor God by caring for creation.

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

Week 7

“Animal Kingdom”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Ask two participants to quote Psalm 8:1-6.

Continue the discussion of the “Go Green” movement from the previous group utilizing the homework question.

Prayer Time:

Ask each group member to share the name of a person in his/her life who needs to accept the Gospel or who is struggling in the Christian walk.

Spend time praying for these individuals.

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:7-8:

All flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

The birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Mankind is clearly differentiated from the animal kingdom in these verses. We are distinctly different from lions, monkeys, bears, eagles, sharks, whales, and thousands of other animal species on planet earth. Take a moment and imagine the depths and the diversity of the fish of the sea. Interestingly, to people who lived in the time of the Old Testament writings the sea was the most inaccessible part of creation. We have a special role in the fulfillment of God's promises to the earth, and at the same time, we have the same command to be fruitful and multiply.

Discussion Questions:

One key word in this section is "all." If all parts of God's creation are under His ultimate control, why do you think natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, etc) happen?

What reasons might God have for allowing such disasters?

Closing

Week 7: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:7-8.

Write Psalm 8:1-8 in the space provided.

Print out a picture of the most unique animal you can find.

Bring the picture to group next week.

What do you find most interesting about this animal?

Week 8

“Praise the Lord!”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/low

Discussion of Homework

Reflection questions:

Ask two volunteers to recite Psalm 8:1-8.

What was the process like of writing the response email? Have you ever been in a situation in which you sent or received an email, phone call, etc. of this nature? How was that situation resolved? Would one of you like to share what you wrote from the homework?

Ask each participant to show their animal picture. This is meant to be fun.

Prayer Time:

Ask each person to share a personal prayer request. Hopefully at this point in the group process each member is comfortable sharing a request. Ask each participant to pray out

loud for the request made by the person sitting on his or her left. If someone in the group prefers to pray silently, that is fine.

Bible study:

Read Psalm 8

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:9:

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The Psalm ends with praise to God. The use of the same expression of praise to God in verse 1 and now in verse 9 is called an inclusio. This envelope structure is used to emphasize a point. In this passage, the psalmist ends like he begins—with an exaltation of God's name. It is essential to keep the perspective that God is the one who receives the ultimate glory and honor.

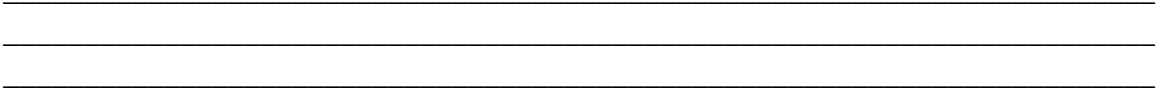
Discussion Questions:

Why does David focus on God's name?

How do you think you would benefit if you focused more on the names of God revealed in the Bible?

Closing

Remind the group that there will be a meal at group next week.



Week 9

Recap and Goodbye

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Reflection Questions:

Ask each participant to read his or her paraphrase of Psalm 8.

Discuss the beauty of personalizing scripture.

Ask a few volunteers to share their thoughts from Hebrew 2: 5-9.

Prayer Time:

Pray for the remaining school year and the group members.

Educational Component:

Provide a brief overview of the group.

Discussion Question:

What impacted you the most?

Closing

Quote Psalm 8 as a group.

Post-Group Questionnaire

References

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Wilson, G. H. (2002). Psalms: The NIV application commentary: From biblical text to contemporary life (Vol. 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Goldingay, J. (2006). Psalms: Psalms 1-41 (Vol. 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

APPENDIX N: God Image Group 2
Spiritual Life Group
Participant Manual

By

Jacqueline Rasar

Doctoral Candidate

Week 1

Spiritual Life Group Introduction

Welcome and Introductions

Group Ground Rules:

1. All group members will be ready to start group on time at each session.
2. All group members will be respectful toward the other members of the group.
3. All group members are responsible to do the weekly homework. If any group member does not complete his or her homework more than twice, he or she will be asked to leave the group.
4. All group members will listen to other group members and not monopolize the time.

Format for each group:

Total Group Time: 55 minutes

5 Minutes: Welcome and Icebreaker

15 Minutes: Discussion of Previous Week and Homework

15 Minutes: Prayer Time

15 Minutes: Bible Study

5 Minutes: Assignment of Homework and Closing

Discuss the direction of the group

Read Psalm 8

Psalm 8

New International Version

A psalm of David

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Introduction to Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the book of Psalms. It speaks to the glory of God and the condescension of God for mankind's behalf. This psalm provides "a commanding vision of the Sovereign God and the created universe and his unfathomable care for humanity" (Wilson, 2002, p. 199).

Four parts of the Psalm (Craigie, 1983):

5. God's majesty and might
6. Mankind's sense of insignificance
7. God's role for mankind
8. Concluding Praise

Read Verse 1

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

Reflections from verse 1:

God has made himself known to humanity and creation. He set his own glory on display. The word glory describes the essence of God—who he really is at his core. The public presence of God is impressive, awe-inspiring, and intimidating (Wilson, 2002). God was sovereign before the creation of the world, so his glory is above the heavens. The psalm opens with the phrase "O LORD, our Lord." The first Hebrew word is Yahweh, and the second Hebrew word is Adonai. There are rich meanings behind these names of God. As Adonai God is master and the sovereign Lord. He certainly is worthy of all praise.

Discussion Questions:

Closing Prayer

Week 1: Homework

Read Psalm 8 every day this week

Psalm 8

New International Version

A psalm of David

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Memorize Verse 1

Write Psalm 8:1 in the space provided

What is one of your favorite praise songs?

Listen to this song three times this week.

Write the lyrics to your favorite verse of this song below.

Week 2

“The Weapon of Praise”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Each week we will begin each group discussion time by going around the circle and sharing one high point and one low point from the previous week. The purpose of this activity is to connect with each other and get the conversations flowing. Please come prepared to the remaining groups with your high and low. Take a few minutes now and think about what you would like to share.

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer Time: Missions

Read Psalm 8

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Bible Study:

Psalm 8:2

From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

Reflections from verse 2:

God chooses to use the weak of this world—children and infants—to establish his strength. Recognizing your own weakness is the first step in putting God in his rightful place. The enemies are any forces that do not recognize the name of God. Since the beginning, God has been in the business of silencing his enemies and proving his sovereignty. This is an ongoing process until God brings them to an ultimate end. Isn't it interesting that God uses praise to silence the enemy?

Discussion Questions:**Closing**

Week 2: Homework

Memorize verse 2

Write Psalm 8:1-2 in the space provided.

Find an article in a newspaper or magazine that speaks to an injustice in the world today.

Read the article and bring it to group next week to discuss.

Write three reflections from the article.

- 1.

- 2.

3. _____

Week 3

"For Your Consideration"

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer Time: Free Will Baptist Bible College

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8.

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,

- the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from verse 3:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

The glory of God is above the heavens; therefore the psalmist begins with the heavens to praise the creative power of God. The size of the cosmos gives us a glimpse at the majesty of God. To think about the creation of the universe as the work of God's fingers leads one to view creation as displays of artistry and ease as God firmly established the elements of creation (Goldingay, 2006).

Isaiah 40:25-26 is another good passage that speaks to God's creative power.

“To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens;
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one,
And calls them each by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
Not one of them is missing.

Discussion Questions and Closing

Week 3: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8: 3.

Write Psalm 8:1-3 in the space provided.

Log on to www.youtube.com

Search “size of the universe”

Watch a few of the videos on this topic.

Week 4

“What is Man?”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer Time: Family

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8 corporately as a group.

- ¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
- ² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:4:

What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

You might be wondering, if the majesty of God is wrapped up in the cosmos, how can I expect God to care for a mere human being like me? The author of Ecclesiastes wrote a similar lament. “Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow” (Ecc. 1:4, 11, NIV). The answer to these questions is in the following phrase. God cares for mankind. Psalm 8 is not about human insignificance, but rather, it is about “divine grace, empowerment, and resultant human responsibility” (Wilson, 2002, p. 205). God is mindful of you!

Discussion Questions:

Closing

Week 4: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:4.

Please write Psalm 8:1-4 in the space provided.

You have opportunities each day to extend care to others in order to thank God for the care He has shown to you and to glorify God's name. Make an attempt each day this week to care for someone through an act of kindness.

Document your acts below.

Week 5

“Crowned for Service”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer time: Praise

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8.

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:5:

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

People are not divine, but they are blessed. To be crowned is to share a bit in the honor and glory of God. This crowning is not meant to lead to arrogance, but rather to service. In the account of creation in Genesis, we learn that humans are the only elements of creation in the image of God. This is the highest honor. The implication here is that humans have a unique relationship with the creator—an image bearer with an outward appearance of weakness (Wilson, 2002). You have value!

Discussion Questions:

Closing

Week 5: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:5.

Write Psalm 8:1-5 in the space provided.

Psalm 8:5 speaks to the blessings of God. Write ten blessings in your life you have received in the last year, ten blessings from the past week, and ten blessings from today. Do not repeat a blessing.

The past year...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

The past week...

11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Today...

21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____
26. _____
27. _____
28. _____
29. _____
30. _____

Week 6

“Exercising Dominion”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer time- the group process

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:6:

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

This verse speaks to the command of God for humans to have dominion over creation. This command is a great responsibility. People are also a part of the created order, and are therefore dependent on the sustaining power of God and his mercy. In this verse, the earth rests under the feet of the elevated humans. This superiority does not indicate human power. It is another reference to human responsibility.

Discussion Questions:

Closing

Week 6: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:6.

Please write Psalm 8:1-6 in the space provided.

After reflecting on the group discussion about the “Go Green” movement, write at least three ways you can honor God by caring for creation.

- 1.

- 2.

3. _____

Week 7

“Animal Kingdom”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Exploratory Questions:

Prayer Time: The Lost

Bible Study:

Read Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:7-8:

All flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,

The birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Mankind is clearly differentiated from the animal kingdom in these verses. We are distinctly different from lions, monkeys, bears, eagles, sharks, whales, and thousands of other animal species on planet earth. Take a moment and imagine the depths and the diversity of the fish of the sea. Interestingly, to people who lived in the time of the Old Testament writings the sea was the most inaccessible part of creation. We have a special role in the fulfillment of God's promises to the earth, and at the same time, we have the same command to be fruitful and multiply.

Discussion Questions:

Closing

Week 7: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:7-8.

Write Psalm 8:1-8 in the space provided.

Print out a picture of the most unique animal you can find.

Bring the picture to group next week.

What do you find most interesting about this animal?

Week 8

“Praise the Lord!”

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/low

Discussion of Homework

Reflection questions:

Prayer Time: Personal Needs

Bible study:

Read Psalm 8

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.

² From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

- ³ When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
- ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
- ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
- ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:
- ⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the beasts of the field,
- ⁸ the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
- ⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Reflections from Psalm 8:9:

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The Psalm ends with praise to God. The use of the same expression of praise to God in verse 1 and now in verse 9 is called an *inclusio*. This envelope structure is used to emphasize a point. In this passage, the psalmist ends like he begins—with an exaltation of God's name. It is essential to keep the perspective that God is the one who receives the ultimate glory and honor.

Discussion Questions:

Closing

Week 8: Homework

Memorize Psalm 8:9.

Write Psalm 8 in the space provided.

Read Hebrews 2:5-9.

**Why do you think the writer of Hebrews sees Jesus in this psalm?
What items in the psalm remind you of Him?**

Paraphrase Psalm 8 in your own words. Spend some time in personal reflection on the truths of this psalm this week.

Week 9

Recap and Goodbye

Welcome and Icebreaker

High/Low

Discussion of Homework

Reflection Questions:

Prayer Time

Educational Component:

Overview of the group

Discussion Question:

Closing

Quote Psalm 8 as a group.

Post-Group Questionnaire

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