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**Community Relational Soul Care: A Transformational Paradigm for Restoring God's
People to Spiritual Vitality**

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNITY RELATIONAL SOUL CARE: A TRANSFORMATIONAL PARADIGM FOR RESTORING GOD'S PEOPLE TO SPIRITUAL VITALITY

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This ministry project is a transformational paradigm for relational soul care in a community that partners with mentors to restore God's children to spiritual vitality for the fulfillment of His plan. The reason for this topic is that after counseling, people still need continued soul care; without continued soul care, they falter, get frustrated, and fall back into unhealthy behaviors. In this research approach, the care seeker is placed with a mentor and a community fellowship group until they flourish in their time. The research method will be a twenty-question Likert Scale Interview for two fellowship groups: men and women. The focus of this thesis is believers who conjoin relational dimensions in cultivating God's work in community with spiritual fellowship and bond together through the trials of life as image-bearing disciples. The potential value for this research is to ascertain whether community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality. In this project, the spiritual layers unfold through the Epistles of John and discover the factors for restoration in spiritual areas of soul care and development for spiritual vitality in relationships with God, others, and God-centered self in community relational soul care.

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¹ All subsequent illustrations are by the author, Julie Larsen

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The appearance of the Dayspring from on High on the horizon of human history was not without human effect. Its shining is the light to reveal our sin. Its warmth is the source to revitalize us in our sorrow. Its beacon redirects our steps. But the ultimate effect of its appearance is the redemption of our soul.

—Elmer L. Towns, *A Journey Through the New Testament*

Community¹ relational soul care² has multidimensional spiritual layers that beg for all of God's children to experience His presence and spiritual fellowship (1 John 1:3).³ Because the fall of man created barriers to experiencing God's holy presence, God's children needed to be restored back to the Father. Scripture reveals that Jesus was the sent One. His mission was coming in the flesh and suffering from His death, burial, and resurrection for all sin of mankind. Yet, when Jesus left this earthly kingdom, He did not leave His children as orphans (John 14:18). He sent the Holy Spirit (Advocate, Helper) so that His children will have a restored love relationship with Him. This project will enfold the transformational paradigm of Jesus Christ's life, light, and love that is highlighted throughout the Epistles of John for believers illuminating God's people for restoration so they will experience spiritual vitality in community.

The paradigm integrates a soul care mentor for direction and accountability as well as a care-seeker who needs spiritual guidance after counseling. Both will engage in community relational soul care fellowship to develop spiritual vitality, which both are under the umbrella of

¹ Community means believers in the Body of Christ where two or more gather in His name (Matt 18:20).

² Relational soul care is different than spiritual formation. Relational soul caregivers bring their mind and heart (inner-self) to love and build up others, encourage, bring God's wisdom, pray, and walk alongside of others on their journey of life. Also, they share a collective focus on Jesus Christ who fellowship and nurture one another to spiritual vitality individually and in community (Acts 2:42).

³ 1 John 1:3, "Unless otherwise stated all Scripture is from the English Standard Version" (Glassport, PA: Biblehub.com, 2016).

influence of the Holy Spirit. This ministry project will focus on the mentor's approach using the three Epistles of John for individual focus and soul care community of believers who can love, learn, listen, and shepherd each other, being emissaries of hope on God's mission. They will be illuminating the path from the Holy Spirit as guardians of the power of the throne of God. The person of the Holy Spirit is the resurrection power that transforms one's life to want to seek and live a healthy vital life. This three-way relationship is intimately connected helping one another to cross through the trials of life, experiencing transformation from the Holy Spirit who paved the way with love and grace.

Spirituality used to be called "holiness, holy living, godliness, walking with God, [and/or] discipleship," but now, this term is elevated to "spiritual formation or transformation, spiritual health, [and/or] spiritual discipline," all weaved together for spiritual soul care guidance.⁴ For this thesis, this researcher is giving Christian spirituality a wholesome name, spiritual vitality. Spiritual vitality could include all the above terms, but it emphasizes the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit led life.

Henri J. M. Nouwen describes spiritual direction as a "relationship initiated by a spiritual seeker who finds a mature person of faith willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to his or her questions about how to live spiritually."⁵ This is what community relational soul caregivers are about: partnering with the Holy Spirit with love and direction spoken to hurting hearts. Regarding the spiritual direction relationship, Nouwen believes there are three disciplines involved: "the heart (prayer), the Book; *Lectio Divina*, (sacred reading of

⁴ J. M. Houston, "Spirituality," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 1138.

⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walks of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), ix.

God's Word), and discipline of community [relationship with God and people of God]."⁶ The relationships in community as the people of God could be called: spiritual friends, sacred companions, soul caregivers, relational soul caregivers, and/or soul friendships.

David Benner says soul friendships are where one brings his or her "whole...inner self...[and] seek to safeguard each other's uniqueness and nurture the growth of each other's inner life...on the human journey."⁷ Furthermore, he reveals that Christian spirituality is "working out our existence in the context of the Christian faith and community," but it goes even deeper.⁸ It starts with a "deep relationship with God that exists when the human spirit is grounded in God's Spirit."⁹ Since God's people are not always grounded in a deep relationship with Him, there is a need for an extension of soul care after counseling in community for the healing journey to spiritual vitality after counseling.

This transformational paradigm can be reproduced for all believers today in the community of Jesus. The example of Jesus' life and ministry are the keys to open all doors to spiritual vitality. As the master of relationships, Jesus is the sent One (*Missio Dei*), the Savior. The Incarnational Jesus socialized with people to get their attention; had compassion for people; served and ministered to people's needs; and brought them to a place to seek eternal life. This invitation, from the God of grace (Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; Eph 3:7; Col 1:6), restores people back to Himself (2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:20, 22). It is for God's chosen people to be set apart and holy (1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 Thess 4:7); a priesthood unto God (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6, 5:10); and Christ-like character as image-bearers (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). Also, it is an

⁶ Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, xviii.

⁷ David Benner, *Scared Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 15.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

invitation to serve God and mankind (John 12:26; Gal 5:13); be followers and doers of His Word (Jas 1:22); and sent out for His mission (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8).

When believers follow the example of Jesus (character, life, and ministry), with a right heart, they will flourish experiencing spiritual maturity while fulfilling God's mission. It will involve a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, loving one another in soul care relationships, and witnessing of His Word. All Christians are called to be ministers unto God; it is not limited to pastors, priests, Christian counselors, lay counselors, mentors, or soul caregivers.

This paradigm design focuses on two main parts to experience transformation in restoring God's people to spiritual vitality. Part one is from the acrostic RELATE: (1) lived (Godward focus) through God and others (soul care relationships) and a spiritually healthy God-centered self (outward focus), individually and corporately, in community relational soul care. Part two is from the acrostic RESTORE: (2) the Epistles of John Bible study (inward focus) based on three major essentials: God is life, God is light, and God is love.

The ministry setting for this project is in the researcher's church. The name of the church is withheld due to confidentiality because of issues from a split congregation four years ago. This researcher would not want to cause any undue harm to the church. This was the beginning for the idea of community relational soul care.

Statement of Purpose

This project focuses on the need for a relational soul care paradigm within the faith community that is essential for lifelong healing. This relational paradigm accomplishes what God originally wanted for His people: to be restored back to Himself by experiencing spiritual transformation for His children's lifelong journey and to live in eternity with Him, all for His glory. For spiritual vitality, it is critical for spiritual guidance after biblical counseling, because

the broken spirit still needs time to renew their thoughts to adapt to a new normal for ways of godly living. When the needy person has biblical counseling, and then released without spiritual direction from a soul care mentor (spiritual leader) and relational soul caregivers for an adjustment time, it can leave a person spiritually unhealthy or unwholesome in many areas of life. This situation has led many people to relapse into old ways of thinking, so ultimately their old behavior remains or they are broken-hearted and confused while struggling with trials. In this mindset, they often feel rejected and sometime blame God and community.

Another problem resides with the fact of how one is qualified to be a mentor (spiritual leader) and who is involved as community soul caregivers. After counseling, hurting individuals should be placed in community (if not already), but no one talks about what is done to help that person from that point on. To help care seekers, there should be a clear method to facilitate boundaries for accountability, spiritual fellowships, and God's Word speaking into believers for application for today. Just being placed in community does not help God's hurting people to continue to cope with their trials of life. The purpose of this project is to show that there is a need for spiritual intercession of continued spiritual leadership and God's Word, besides soul care fellowship for healing. If there was not a need for community relational soul care after counseling, God's people would not need relationships to help each other (1 Cor 12:12; 14:26), as the saints are "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."¹⁰

Furthermore, there are hindrances to spiritual formation because some people do not carry a pure heart and willfully maintain sinful behavior in their lives. Understanding why there are barriers for spiritual transformation in community relational soul care is necessary for successful wholeness of mind, body, and soul.

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:12

Research is needed to see if community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality. The significance for this project has a three-fold purpose for vitality in community. The overarching aim is about believers seeking deep communion with the relational God, relationship with others, and relation to a God-centered self in an awareness of realigning their lives to be transformed into His likeness. Ultimately, spiritually mature disciples will be sent out on God's mission as witnesses of the Word to the world. This scriptural framework is foundational because it is based on Jesus' life and ministry through the Epistles of John and soul care relationships for restoring God's children to spiritual vitality.

Special Terminology

Special terminology is used throughout the following thesis project, including:

Community means believers in the Body of Christ where two or more gather together in His name (Matt 18:20).

Community relational soul caregivers are interlocking together in fellowship sharing a collective focus on Jesus Christ who help nurture one another to spiritual vitality for their journey individually and corporately. Relational soul caregivers communicate God's wisdom to hurting souls; they are spiritual friends shepherding one another.

RELATE is an acrostic for relational soul care givers that nurture others spiritually and emotionally to spiritual vitality in community.

RESTORE is an acrostic for restoring God's children through the study of His Word (Epistles 1, 2, 3, John).

Spiritual guidance, spiritual direction, holiness, discipleship, spirituality or spiritual formation are used interchangeably; this means the deep inner life of a believer and/or a helper who moves someone forward to godly living to spiritual vitality.

A soul care mentor is a mature spiritual leader who is specifically trained in the Bible. They could have professional degrees in biblical counseling or other additional training in the psychological field of counseling.

A soul care seeker is a person who seeks help for direction or guidance for his or her life from the pastor, priest, counselor, mentor, or community relational soul caregivers.

Spiritual vitality is a name for Christian life that begs for spiritually healthy believers in all areas for psychological, physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual wholeness.

Statement of Limitations

This thesis has at least five limitations. Starting with the first point, this thesis project does not attempt to impart the best methods for biblical counseling or fields of integrated psychology. Moreover, this thesis will not claim any statistics of data on ways of counseling methods. The researcher will include scholars who have extensive knowledge for soul care counseling, but its concerns are directed for spiritual vitality after counseling.

Second, it is not the intent of this thesis to formulate a better compilation of models of soul care; rather, this project expands on existing soul care research. The need for expansion has brought to surface the continuation of people still struggling to cope or heal for wholeness after counseling and for lifelong healing.

Third, although the writer will emphasize the need for education of the Bible and more advanced education for Christian counselors, this project will only center on the qualifications in education for the mentor (spiritual leader) and the knowledge in the Bible for soul caregivers.

Fourth, the research data will not be on the whole community or the mentor but only on two specific groups for fellowship in community of soul caregivers. The first group consists of a men's organizational fellowship group. The second group is a woman's organizational

fellowship group in community that meets people's needs and shepherds one another to spiritual vitality.

Fifth, there are models of soul care written to help believers overcome problems or issues in life, but there are no transformational paradigms for mentors based on a format of the Epistles of John and community relational soul caregivers that this writer has found. Furthermore, since there are no models like this and this paradigm has never been proven before, there are limitations within this method itself.

Theological Basis

For the researcher's topic, it is imperative to revisit history, going back in the Old Testament for spiritual soul care relationships (e.g. 1 Sam 3:9; 2 Sam 12:7). Relationships are the core for every believer because God made man in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26) to have a love relationship with Him and others. God Himself is a Triune, communal, and relational being; however, problems elevated with the fall of man, as there was no way to get back to the Lord. Therefore, the Lord over creation designated a plan for restoring His people from the beginning, who sent His Son as a substitute for the sins of mankind.

For restoration to be sealed (God's plan), three covenants had to happen. Darrell Bock discusses the three covenants in God's narrative story that are foundational for God's promise to develop and further His plan to restore relationships back to Himself: the "Abrahamic, Davidic, and the New Covenant."¹¹ This is where community relational soul care falls at the feet for all Christians: one is to love others because "God's love is the core of the gospel."¹² God sought after His image-bearers (*Imago Dei*) in pursuit of His divine love. The Abrahamic covenant was

¹¹ Darrell Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 8.

¹² Ibid.

about Abraham because of His faith and love for God who found favor from God, being blessed, fathered a “special people...a seed (Gen 12:1-3), a people in touch with a true God...they became a nation (God’s kingdom of priests and God’s holy nation, Exod 19:6) to honor God.”¹³

The special chosen people wanted to be like other nations; consequently, Israel wanted a human king who would fight for them (1 Sam 8). Therefore, God still in a love pursuit, gave them a king that led to the Davidic covenant. This covenant was expanded to continue God’s promise from the “line of kings through the house of David (2 Sam:8-16),”¹⁴ because David had a heart for God “who will do all my will.”¹⁵ Out of this line of kings, who would be God’s representative, came the promise of the “hope of the Messiah [Jesus], a king that would bring peace and establish righteousness.”¹⁶

Finally, the New Covenant was declared by the Lord in Jeremiah 31:31-34, but since His chosen people could not keep a covenant, God Himself would place “His law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor 3:3; Rom 2:29). Gordon Johnson said that Jeremiah included “repentant Gentiles” with the Jewish believers in the “New Covenant, creating one people of God;” therefore, the “New covenant realities are fulfilling Jeremiah’s Old Covenant expectations.”¹⁷ However, “Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant by His sacrifice,” and through His Spirit, one is transformed into His glory (2 Cor

¹³ Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Acts 13:22.

¹⁶ Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, 10.

¹⁷ Gordon H. Johnson, “Jeremiah, Eschatology of Renewal of Covenant Relationships: New Covenant,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 161.

3:4-18). Furthermore, the “New Covenant blessings have been inaugurated for Jewish and Gentile believers in the church (Eph 1:13-14; 3:1-9).”¹⁸

However, God still pursued His special people and had to send the deliverer (Jesus) to fix the problem and would become the mediator between God and mankind. The deliver would also give them resurrection power to overcome sin and live in spiritual vitality. Elmer Towns says, “in the covenant of grace, all is ‘ordained in the hand of a mediator’ because man’s sin had else excluded him from access to God’s holiness.”¹⁹

Darrell Bock continues to talk about how God said there would be “forgiveness of sin...God’s law written on the heart” and that “forgiveness...was designed to provide a way to a restored relationship with God” and to help His people.²⁰ Furthermore, according to Bock, “they needed God’s presence and power within them...[and] God’s Spirit dwelling within them;” however, in order to be united with the Spirit one needs to have a renewed heart.²¹ This unity of Spirit is prayed for by Jesus in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17:21, “that they may all be one.” Millard Erickson says that this unity “between the Father and the Son is a model for the unity of believers with one another. The unity of believers with each other and with God will testify to the world that the Father has sent the Son.”²²

Restoration back to God the Father required the mediator (John 14:6). The Triune relationship is united with mankind again in a love relationship through Christ in the reconciliation by the New Covenant; however, there is still a problem. Since, not all believers

¹⁸ Johnson, “Jeremiah,” 161.

¹⁹ Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 489.

²⁰ Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, 11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 1137.

commune with the Trinity or are not nurtured in relationships with the body of believers (community), this effects the mind, heart, and soul of faith, when trials overcome believers in the journey of life; therefore, there is little or no spiritual vitality. God designed man to be in a relationship with Him, with others, and a God-centered self to evolve into Christ-likeness. It is a lifelong journey.

Augustine had a concept of the inward journey (pilgrimage) for the soul on the quest of God. He believed that the unity of the mind (cognitive) and “dimensions of the soul” should be a goal for believers, for the “soul experiences the eternal life that comes through knowing (John 17:3) and loving God (Matt 22:37) –namely, union with God.”²³ This would give believers spiritual vitality, equipping them for the journey of life.

This union with God is also to be a union with believers according to Philippians 1:27 (one spirit), and Ephesians 4:4, that is told as “one in Spirit.” When the whole body of Christ works together (unity) to seek the relational God, using all their gifts as the early church did, it will begin to change lives. Ray Stedman talks about the “original strategy of Ephesians 4, when we have given all Christians in the body their God-given role as ministers of God’s eternal plan, then the entire body comes alive with resurrection power.”²⁴ The Triune power is where “lives are changed. Ministries explode. Communities are touched and healed. The church becomes healthy and vital again.”²⁵ Stedman continues to say that the “entire body of believers, should be equipped, guided, and encouraged by those who are gifted by God to expound and apply His

²³ Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 61.

²⁴ Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life: The Book That Inspired a Return to the Church’s Real Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1995), 113.

²⁵ Ibid.

Word with wisdom and power.”²⁶ This is where all believers need to take responsibility to use their God-given gifts, especially to care for the hurting souls and equip people into mature disciples in community for God’s mission.

When love is restored, God’s people will have new hearts that bring the presence of the living Spirit of God dwelling within them, illuminating spiritual vitality into their lives. True life, light, and love are only found in the living Spirit of Jesus Christ. So, when Christians have trials, they should “entrust their souls” to the Lord Jesus as He suffered for the sake of mankind (Luke 9:22).

Returning to the covenant, it was foretold in Ezekiel 36:25-27 that God, by His love covenant, would restore His relationship with His people by giving His people a new heart and a new spirit to follow Him in obedience in a love relationship. When the incarnational Jesus came, He was the renewed Spirit; He died for the forgiveness of sins and gave His people a restored relationship by the Holy Spirit. It was also foretold in Joel 2:28-32, that God would pour out His spirit upon all sons and daughters as told at Pentecost, but the ones who received the Spirit had a cost. The cost would include that “those in whom the Spirit dwells...had both a mission and a responsibility to share it with others.”²⁷ Pentecost, therefore, is a renewal of God’s words about the covenantal promises to enable all His children to be restored “whom the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:38-39).” This also means that now they are filled with the Holy Spirit and can live an abundant life in spiritual wholeness.

As planned by God the Father, Jesus had to suffer for mankind, so they could be restored to a new life and rejoined back to the Father. Jesus had to leave this world or the Comforter

²⁶ Stedman, *Body Life*, 112.

²⁷ Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*, 16.

could not come, but He promised a Helper (*parakletos*). William Barclay discusses the Helper (*parakletos*) in John 14:15-17:

The Greek word is the word *parakletos* (Greek #3875) which is really untranslatable, but it shows the riches of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit... Always a *parakletos* (Greek #3875) is someone called in to help in time of trouble or need.... The word comes from the Latin *fortis* which means brave; and a comforter was someone who enabled some dispirited creature to be brave... a comforter is someone who sympathizes with us when we are sad.... to cope with things. That is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life. The Holy Spirit substitutes victorious for defeated living. So, what Jesus is saying is: I am setting you a hard task, and I am sending you out on a very difficult engagement. But I am going to send you someone, the *parakletos* (Greek #3875), who will guide you as to what to do and enable you to do it.²⁸

The Gospel of John and the Epistles of John, emphasize that love and fellowship are connected within the Bible for God and others. Jesus stated, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”²⁹ God’s love is about a relationship with mankind, formed in a union, and bonded together with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Also, John 14:25-31 states that the Holy Spirit teaches all the things that Jesus told the disciples and now to all His children. His believers are to seek after Him as God is life, God is the light, and God is love. The Holy Spirit is the only way through which a believer can have a relationship with the Trinity.

Richard Averbeck writes how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of the saints. He tells how God’s children are all broken vessels that need to be restored, by the refining process.³⁰ History shows that God works with brokenness. Job 41:25 states that “by reason of breakings they purify themselves,” which means that when His people “cry out to Him” (Ps 102:28), God

²⁸ William Barclay, “John 14,” *William Barkley Daily Study Bible*, last modified 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/john-14.html>.

²⁹ John 14:6.

³⁰ Richard E. Averbeck, “A Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 27, accessed December 1, 2016, Academic OneFile.

will restore them. There are several places in Scripture that show where “breaking” or brokenness was good for restoration. Jacob had his natural strength that wrestled with God; Jesus broke the bread in feeding the four thousand (Mark 8:6), the five thousand (Luke 9:16), and broke bread for His disciples (Luke 22:19; Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22).³¹ Averbek shows the refining process is the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-29; 2 Cor 3:28):

The work of the Holy Spirit is the human spirit occupying, empowering, and reshaping us and our lives from the inside out. (2) The Holy Spirit works in us into local communities of faith in which He dwells in which we have fellowship with one another. (3) The Holy Spirit makes us into prophets and prophetic communities that stand out into the world showing forth God’s glory and attracting others to Him.³²

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, Christians cannot have a deep love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father so loved the world and gave His only Son (John 3:16) to have a love relationship with His children to “search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.”³³ Also, Jesus spoke of the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:40).³⁴ In Galatians 6:2, believers are also instructed to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” God’s nature is love, so it is all about an intimate communal love with His children, and they, in turn, love and minister to their neighbors.

J. M. Houston states spirituality as a “state of deep relationship with God.”³⁵ Also, Houston discusses spiritual friendship and the nature of spirituality:

Biblical revelation of God; Christocentric; life in the Trinity; is the out working then, of the grace of God in the soul of man...growth and maturity in a Christlike life community and fellowship (Eph 4:15-16), a life of prayer (Matt 6:5-15; 1 Thess 5:17) ...The Spirit-

³¹ Averbek, “A Spirit, Community, and Mission, 27.

³² Ibid.

³³ Deuteronomy 4:29.

³⁴ Matthew 22:38-39.

³⁵ Houston, “Spirituality,” 1138.

filled life is one that manifests practically the Spirit of Jesus, with the fruit of love... (Gal 5:22-23). Christian spirituality engenders fellowship and the communion of saints deepens its character. As social beings, the reality of our public worship (Acts 2:42), Godliness and spiritual friendship reinforce each other, as a horizontal and a vertical way respectively, to inspire and to embody the love of God in human hearts. For Christian worship is not primarily a matter of special practices, but of lifestyle (Rom 12:1, 14:6; 1 Cor 10:31).³⁶

Community relational soul care proclaims to love others by caring for their souls, serving, and ministering to one another, whether in trials or spiritual friendship. In the New Testament, the followers of Jesus experienced the fellowship of believers going out daily from “house to house...teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Also, they sold their material things, donating their money, food, clothing, and whatever else they needed to do for helping ones in need with “glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:45-47).

Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez discuss the words “to minister (*diaknois*),” they say it means it is “work that benefits someone else.”³⁷ Paul used this word to “describe himself as a servant of the Lord (1 Cor 3:5), God’s ministers (2 Cor 6:4), ministers of a New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6), a servant of this gospel (Eph 3:7), and a minister of the church (Col 1:25).”³⁸ Earley and Gutierrez state further that ministry was not just for Paul because his “co-workers were also servants” who were men and women that also ministered to God’s people “(Rom 16:1; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 1 Tim 4:6).”³⁹ If one was a believer of Jesus, then as a follower, he or she was also a minister since “Jesus said that His followers should be servants (John 12:26). All Christians must

³⁶ Houston, “Spirituality,” 1139-1140.

³⁷ Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez, *Ministry Is...* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 8.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

do the work of a servant or minister. We are all servants or ministers of Christ, servants of His message and servants of one another.”⁴⁰

Administers of grace who are community soul caregivers intercede to help the hurting, help clarify our God-given gifts, and help strengthens one’s purpose for life. Also, soul caregivers are “family, faith, and friends” who teaches “us how to live a true-self, a life of trust, receptivity and love...if we are attentive to this way of living in community,” believers will be formed by “two primary virtues-humility and gratitude.”⁴¹

Jesus is the prime example of greatness for His humility in His death on the cross. John Dickson says Christians believe the “crucifixion was not evidence of Jesus’s humiliation (*humilitas*), but proof that greatness can express itself in humility...the noble choice to lower your-self for the sake of others.”⁴² Also, Siang-Yang Tan makes it clear that “humility is an essential part of true Christian spirituality or maturity in Christ [to be whole in mind, body, and spirit], as well as servanthood.”⁴³

Furthermore, Tan states to “support their neighbors” (others), is a way of community care.⁴⁴ This community (soul) care, helps one to persevere through trials to “encourage one another with love and good deeds” (Heb 10:24-25); “value others” (Phil 2:3); “exhort one another” (Heb 3:13); “build each other up” (1 Thess 5:11; Rom 14:19); and edify one another in community (1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:12). Also, it means to share with those in need and “bringing

⁴⁰ Earley and Gutierrez, *Ministry Is*, 8.

⁴¹ Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to the Deep Connection of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 122-127.

⁴² John Dickson, *Humilitas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 107.

⁴³ Siang-Yang Tan, *Full Service: Moving from Self-Serve Christianity to Total Servanthood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 88.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

grace and mercy” to others (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:29). Every believer is a minister expected to use his or her gifts to help one another build up the body of believers in community, while being an imitator of Jesus, who is the life, light, and love; now, this is spiritual vitality!

Elmer Towns makes the point that “the Body of Christ is designed to teach us that we need one another...and care for one another,” but “we must show ourselves one in Christ, united in love and a shared life” that is “Spirit-given,” which is “essential to maturity and health.”⁴⁵ There are essentials to develop spiritual vitality for a disciplined journey of life.

The overarching goal in the New Covenant for the early church and for all believers today is that all Christians must become spiritually mature vital image-bearers (*Imago Dei*) to be united in love with God and others, sharing fellowship in the Body of Christ in community. Ultimately, it is vital to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). God’s people are equipped with the blood of the sent One, Jesus Christ (*Missio Dei*). According to the Bible, God is a relational and missionary God. He sent His Son Jesus into the world to redeem His children back to Himself to have a love relationship again, and they are to be missional and kingdom-minded. This is God’s love story, now His people’s love story for one another.

Statement of Methodology

Understanding why people never become totally free from their trials and burdens after counseling is a challenge for all counselors, but especially for Christian counselors, pastors, priests, and soul caregivers. Just being in the church is not enough to have spiritual vitality. What are the answers to have spiritual wholeness in mind, body, and spirit, even among trials for God’s children? This question will be answered by the research for a biblical solution.

⁴⁵ Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today* (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 638.

The main approach for research is a phenomenological study that includes a twenty-question Likert scale questionnaire centering on two groups: one for men and one for women, both in community fellowship.⁴⁶ The questions will cover a wide range of relational and spiritual connections and fellowship besides experiencing relational aspects of God, others and self.

For lasting restoration and lifelong healing, the first phase is solidified through a mentor (spiritual leader), and then with community relational soul caregivers who form a bond of love and trust. Under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit, they help each other on their journey. These administrators of God's grace form a "communitarian" approach that is "rooted in deep respect for the resurrection power of God's Spirit to change lives through spiritual community" who are ministers and servants of God that love God, others and self.⁴⁷

The method is a transformational paradigm that begins after counseling with a soul care mentor (spiritual leader) and goes through a biblical manual from the Epistles of John, who meets monthly for at least seven months (this can be adapted). Also, that person is placed in community fellowship group(s) that are evangelistic in nature and fulfil soul care needs for helping others. They also fellowship in and out of church. Moreover, this paradigm for biblical application has three sections: a relational God (God is love), others (God is light), and a God-minded self (God is life) that lives outside and inside community relational soul care. These relational aspects are dimensional in the theological foundation for God, understanding of human behavior for others (neighbors), and a wholesome God-minded self that are all woven together

⁴⁶ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 56.

⁴⁷ Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What a Church Can Be* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 322, Kindle.

for a transformational paradigm for the journey to spiritual vitality. When mature, disciples are sent out on God's mission to complete the circle of love all over again.

Chapter one and introduction: this researcher has engaged with the topic and provided a detailed understanding of relational soul care and the transformational paradigm is presented. The researcher has determined that the topic has the quality and potential to be successful in finding a solution for hurting people in a transformational paradigm. It will discuss what the researcher will accomplish and will not accomplish. There is a clear statement of the claim for the project: a need for a paradigm for after counseling so unhealed believers still hurting can work at maturity.

Also, this writer iterated what she hopes to accomplish with the research, why she chooses this topic, and how important this topic is to hurting people for restoring God's children to spiritual vitality for the lifelong journey. There is an explanation from soul care experts and the theological background.

Chapter two contains research that is pertinent to this researcher's topic. This writer will present a transformational paradigm for community relational soul care that will focus on spiritual maturity for after counseling separated in two parts. Part One RELATE centers on shared experiences that focus on Jesus Christ with the community of believer's (outward focus). Part Two RESTORE engages with a mentor (spiritual leader) and studies God's Word in the Epistles of John (inward focus), so the care seeker can apply godly character and behavior to adjust to his or her circumstances. This chapter will also cite current expert resources.

Chapter three is the applied research and the research participants. It will discuss why this type of research was chosen. The phenomenological study is foundational for the instrument tool, the Likert Scale twenty-question questionnaire, that will be used to determine how

community relational soul caregivers respond to questions to determine spiritual vitality in relationships with God, others and self. It will show the survey results from the data that was collected from the experiment using a phenomenological study. There will be scholarly research and tables to help explain the results of the research project.

Chapter four is the summary and conclusion combining all the information for the entire project. All the major points in the thesis will be summarized, and a finalized statement will be defined. The question for the research is: does community relational soul care transform Christians to spiritual vitality? The result will show data from the questionnaire that will demonstrate if there is a need for community relational soul care paradigm that includes a mentor and community soul caregivers shepherding one another to spiritual vitality.

Review of Literature

Books

Scared Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction by David Benner.

David Benner has three parts to his book. First, he discusses spiritual friendships and transformation for the journey, but he also talks about spiritual direction. This is where he shows a model of how to equip the director. Finally, he combines all the above that he labels for friendships as sacred companions. This researcher can use his knowledge and research to show how he developed the spiritual director or mentor.⁴⁸

A God Centered Church: Experiencing God Together by Henry T. Blackaby and Melvin D. Blackaby.

⁴⁸ Benner, *Scared Companions*.

This book is critical for research because the Blackaby's give an overview of the true church. They begin with the family of God, fellowship, the Son's mission, and the power of the Holy Spirit that equips the believers for the mission. It relates to this researcher's topic because it shows how community is a place for a love relationship with God and the true spiritual family. They elaborate on the fellowship of God and one another, how to grow in Christian maturity, and the importance of being sent out on God's mission.⁴⁹

Called and Accountable: Discovering Your Place in God's Eternal Purpose by Henry T. Blackaby and Norman C. Blackaby.

This book was based on a set of three sermons at a conference that was done by Henry Blackaby. He believes every Christian is called of God (Rom 1:6), to walk worthy (Eph 4:1; 2 Thess 1:11), and be accountable to God for their actions. The Lord gives everyone gifts that are to be used for the purposes of God; therefore, He sends His people out as kingdom workers in the world. This book will be used to show the importance that every believer has a part in God's ministry to work for the kingdom. Also, when one is placed in community soul care, that person is accountable for his or her actions and what he or she does for God and others.⁵⁰

Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda by Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby.

This book is important to the research, because it walks the reader through the role of spiritual leadership for all the leaders in community relational soul care. The Blackabys discuss leadership influence regarding the mentor and community soul caregivers. Spiritual leadership is

⁴⁹ Henry T. Blackaby and Melvin D. Blackaby, *A God Centered Church: Experiencing God Together* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2007).

⁵⁰ Henry T. Blackaby and Norman C. Blackaby, *Called and Accountable: Discovering Your Place in God's Eternal Purpose* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2007).

a critical aspect in ministry and different than just secular leadership. This book talks about the decision-making process necessary for all leaders. They show how to develop leaders and how to influence others by love, communication, servanthood, temperament, encouragement, prayer, ethics, and to focus on “God’s agenda.”⁵¹

Recovering the Real Lost Gospel by Darrell Bock.

Darrell Bock walks the reader through the gospel, and he believes that the Bible can transform one’s life. He describes the Bible as a love story from Genesis to Revelation that can change lives for any situation. Since he traces the Old Testament to the present, this reader will use his development of covenants for restoration in this thesis.⁵²

Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament by Darrell Bock.

Darrell Bock writes this exegetical commentary while keeping in mind new research regardless of where its source comes from. He recognizes the danger of bias and looks to the research and the Bible to explain his verse by verse commentary.⁵³ This researcher needs this book for the outline of Acts 2, how the new community becomes the true church of Christ and how it has a separate new identity from the Jewish community. This book shows how the community life involves four main areas devoted to fellowship and communion with Jesus’ teachings.

Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving by Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman and Donald C. Guthrie.

⁵¹ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 119.

⁵² Bock, *Recovering the Real Lost Gospel*.

⁵³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

This book is all about the works of ministry, how to be fruitful and resilient overall; however, it is important to this writer for self-care to maintain spiritual practices for spiritual vitality on the journey home and in community. There are two main sections just on spiritual formation for maturity.⁵⁴

“Soul Care” by Tim Clinton, Ron Hawkins, and Ryan Carboneau.

“Soul Care” is explained in a variety of ways in this chapter, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*. They discuss the importance of the history of soul care and how it relates to counseling, spiritual direction, and its application. They also talk about the meaning of four elements that are needed for one-on-one mentoring for spiritual direction in community relational soul care, as “healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guiding.”⁵⁵

Real Church: Does it Exist? Can I Find It? by Larry Crabb.

Larry Crabb’s book analyzes different types of churches, but takes readers to the church that is hungry for spiritual formation and a place for the continuing maturation process. This book confirms the critical need for spiritual vitality for the long journey in a community of believers who are Holy Spirit fed. It is a love relationship for the journey. From the selection of types of churches he takes is a God-centered church that teaches “spiritual theology” and has “spiritual community” on a “spiritual mission.”⁵⁶

Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide by Gary R. Collins.

Gary Collins writes a comprehensive guide to Christian counseling; however, this researcher can use knowledge in different areas, as he explains the responsibility to all Christians

⁵⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Tim Clinton, Ron Hawkins, and Ryan Carboneau, “Soul Care,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, ed. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 15-17.

⁵⁶ Larry Crabb, *Real Church: Does it Exist? Can I Find It?* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2009), xix.

to carry one another's burdens. Also, Collins says the gift of exhortation [like counseling] is given to believers by God for helping one another. He says that "the Greek word *paraklesis*," means "coming along side to help...[which] implies admonishing, confronting, supporting, and encouraging people to face the future."⁵⁷

Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God by Greg Ogden.

Greg Ogden writes that all believers of Jesus Christ are to take their part in ministry. Therefore, he wants people to know that ministry is not just for the gifted clergy; it is for all of God's children to do their service for the Body of Christ. It is the unfinished business of God. John Ortberg made a statement in this book, that it is every believers responsibility and "God's intent is for everyone in his community to be a vital contributor to His redemptive purpose."⁵⁸ It is a purposeful book for this researcher, because this book shows how to equip believers. Ogden separates God's gifts into sections: "support, speaking, service and signs."⁵⁹

Courageous Faith: Life Lessons from Old Testament Heroes by Ed. Hindson.

Dr. Ed. Hindson's book is a remarkable story of faith journey lessons for people from the Old Testament who walked, talked, and communed with God. Hindson uses four steps for core elements for vision, including Nehemiah's vision. It is important for all leaders to have a vision, and plan of action. In this case, Nehemiah used his plan for the rebuilding of the wall (Neh 6:15).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*. 3 ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 35.

⁵⁸ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 290.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶⁰ Ed. Hindson, *Courageous Faith: Life Lessons from Old Testament Heroes* (Chattooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 198-199.

Journals

“To Live Lives Worthy of God: Leadership and Spiritual Formation in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12” by Truls Akerlund.

Truls Akerlund gives a fair account of this Scripture passage. He shows the leadership of Paul who counseled in the Thessalonian community. This researcher can use Paul’s skills of leadership. Some churches and most people will have distress at some point, but “live one’s life worthy of one’s calling.”⁶¹ He says leadership and the correct type of teaching is important.

“The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Well-Being” by John Fisher.

This author’s topic is directly impacted for spiritual health because of a relationship with “physical, mental, emotional, social and vocational well-being [and] reflected in the quality of relationships that people have up to four domains of spiritual well-being.”⁶² John Fisher believes spiritual health has a direct relationship for overall well-being on a person’s soul.

“Glimpses of Lament: 2 Corinthians and the Presence of Lament in the New Testament” by Andrew Hassler.

The subject of lament in the New Testament has hardly arrested the attention of scholars until recently. Andrew Hassler has suggested a pattern of lament in 2 Corinthians. The writer for this thesis believes that some of the laments of Old Testaments can be helpful when someone is

⁶¹ Truls Akerlund, “To Live Lives Worthy of God: Leadership and Spiritual Formation in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 9, no.1 (2016): 30, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁶² John Fisher, “The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Well-Being,” *Journal of Religion* no. 2 (2011): 17, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

hurting. It can be helpful in soul care for a “true back-and-forth covenant interaction with God, rather than one that only allows for praise.”⁶³

“Six Themes to Guide Formational Ministry Based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,” by Klaus Issler.

This article discusses the confusion from many scholars that lay out the ways of spiritual formation for a believer. Klaus Issler uses the model from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount as one suggestion to build his six themes that form a framework for Christian living. These themes are useful for this researcher.⁶⁴

“Five Key Barriers to Deep Learning and Character Formation Based Primarily on Jesus’s Parable of the Four Soils” by Klaus Issler.

Klaus Issler found five formation hindrances to mature spiritual formation for believers. This researcher can use Issler’s barriers to develop spirituality in both leaders and hurting souls to fix what they are doing wrong. Transformation can only happen when a person seeks to have character like Christ.⁶⁵

⁶³ Andrew Hassler, “Glimpses of Lament: 2. Corinthians and the Presence of Lament in the New Testament,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 9, no. 2 (2016): 164-175, accessed December 9, 2016, Academic OneFile.

⁶⁴ Klaus Issler, “Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation Ministry Based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no 2 (2010): 366-388, accessed December 10, 2016, Academic OneFile.

⁶⁵ Klaus Issler, “Five Key Barriers to Deep Learning and Character Formation Based Primarily on Jesus’s Parable of the Four Soils,” *Christian Education Journal* 9 (Spring 2012): 138, accessed December 9, 2016, General OneFile.

Chapter 2

Community Relational Soul Care

The following incorporates different ways for believers to grow in maturity for spiritual formation and transformational change, as God made everyone unique (Ps 139; Eph 2:10); therefore, because people have different ways of relating, there are many ways of engaging in relational soul care to help be restored to spiritual vitality. In the following pages, various scholars will voice their ideas, models, and paradigms that will add to spiritual wholeness in understanding community relational soul care. Also, there are eight main core essentials that function as the foundation for this soul care paradigm.

In this chapter, the transformational paradigm in restoring God's people is presented in two parts. Part one, from the acrostic RELATE, includes a foundation for community relational soul caregivers (fellowship groups), including the eight core essentials for spiritual vitality. The essentials are: inward focus (divine reading of God's Word, love, worship, prayer and obedience), outward focus (community life and service), besides Godward focus (God's mission, *Missio Dei*), in community relational soul care.

Part two, from the acrostic RESTORE, is an individual Bible study in the Epistles of John. This will give a foundation of Scripture, a hermeneutical understanding, and application for growing to maturity for the care seeker. RESTORE is more than bonding with the mentor and care seeker for God's Word and guidance in spiritual direction. Until a few decades ago, "about ninety-five percent of trained spiritual directors were Jesuits."¹

¹ James M. Houston, "Seeking Historical Perspectives for Spiritual Direction and Soul Care Today," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 88-105, accessed December 9, 2016, *Academic OneFile*.

Today, spiritual directors (leaders/mentors) help “more than just saving the soul;” God’s children need “more wholistic view of the Christian life” in order to develop inward focus, outward focus, and Godward focus in spiritual wholeness.² The main goal of this paradigm is restoring one’s relationship with Jesus Christ living out in the community the acrostic RELATE and RESTORE (Matt 22:37-39) for spiritual vitality.

Furthermore, this paradigm with RESTORE includes Bible study applications from prominent scholars and spiritual leaders who have expert knowledge in the Bible. The researcher has used study Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias from those who have researched soul care and/or walked in the shoes of soul caregivers. Their academic research may be helpful for corporate or individual application for soul care seekers. Since no two people use an identical application of applying God’s truth, this is where the researcher can have abundant academic information for the care seeker. All of this information can help believers understand their thoughts in times of distress or simply to understand more about soul care to help other people.

This paradigm’s overarching focus is restoring God’s people through His Word and the community of believers for fellowship and God’s work. Gary Collins says, “every Christian has a responsibility to help and counsel [encourage] others” to “build up” the body of Christ.”³ Soul care mentors are not limited to Christian counselors, “church leaders ...pastors or elders;” they can be community caregivers who are trained in the Bible who are encouragers, mentors, and “trained in care-giving/counseling skills.”⁴ Community relational soul caregivers aim to guide care seekers in spiritual transformation by renewing their thoughts, learning to cope with trials,

² Houston, "Seeking Historical Perspectives," 88-105.

³ Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 35.

⁴ Ibid.

leaning on God's love, allowing time for healing, strengthening their faith in trials, adjusting their lives for a plan of action for godly living to spiritual maturity, and setting outward on God's mission.

The community relational soul care paradigm includes direction and guidance with a mentor (spiritual leader) while developing shared life experiences with the community of believers in a collaborative focus on Jesus Christ. The overarching goal is a restored intimate relationship with the Triune God that continually grows in love for the journey with God, others, and a healthy God-minded self to spiritual vitality. All of this information is pertinent to this researcher's topic, adding to spiritual vitality. This paradigm begins with Jesus's life and ministry as an example for the believer's journey. Also, as believers, they will have resurrection power for living the Holy Spirit-filled life.

Community Relational Soul Care Paradigm to Spiritual Vitality

Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no resurrection power to have spiritual vitality. Klaus Issler says, "Scripture shows that the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus so that He could live predominately in His humanity."⁵ Early in Jesus' ministry, He goes into the synagogue in Nazareth, reads from scroll from Isaiah 61:1-2, and announced the Spirit is with Him:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.⁶

Jesus's words may have confused his listeners, but He told everyone that He was the promised Anointed One who was sent to restore God's people. Issler reiterated what Darrell

⁵ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 118.

⁶ Luke 4:18-19.

Bock said about this passage. Jesus talked about “Himself to be the bearer of... ‘God’s new age of salvation’ being the one who has received the ‘anointing with God’s Spirit.’”⁷ According to Ed. Hindson, Jesus was making a point that “Our Lord was claiming that He was indeed the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecies.”⁸

Jesus was sent to the poor to announce freedom to the ones who are oppressed for a “future and a hope” (Jer 29:11). His “birth, death, burial, and resurrection happens because God is working out a plan that He had set in place long ago.”⁹ Furthermore, when Jesus spoke about the “poor” and “rich,” it had connections to the Old Testament that meant “these terms held not only economic but social and spiritual significance.”¹⁰

In the “messianic message” of Luke 4:18, Gaspar Colon says Jesus was also saying to the people the focus must not be about “their own hunger, but rather on the needs of others.”¹¹ Colon believes in the “Christ Method Alone formula” of ministry for the church body, as this “indwelling walk with Christ requires that the members of this body... take the proclamation of the gospel to a new level, which follows a pattern of ministry and discipleship that is evident in the life and ministry of Jesus.”¹² This indwelling walk can be seen in how Jesus communicated with people socially and how people experienced Him. Colon also says Christ used a four-step

⁷ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 118.

⁸ Ed Hindson, “Isaiah, Eschatology of the Coming Messiah,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 152.

⁹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹¹ Gaspar F. Colon, “Incarnational Community-Based Ministry: A Leadership Model for Community Transformation,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 6, no. 2 (2012): 11, accessed August 8, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

formula to reach people: “socialize, sympathize, serve, and salvation.”¹³ This method will keep Jesus as the center of ministry. When the Christian community walks with Jesus in this four-step style, they live according to the gospel’s design, loving and growing as His disciples.

After Jesus’ earthly ministry ended with His death, burial, and resurrection, He sent a mediator (Holy Spirit) in His place to continue a love relationship with His people. Ron Hawkins and Tim Clinton say caregivers are God’s helpers; they are administrators as “*Parakaleo* refers to ‘coming alongside’ needy brothers and sisters and assisting them to health and holiness.”¹⁴ This helper is hope to struggling Christians for needed soul care who can be seen in “1 Thess 5:14 (2 Cor 1:3-7).”¹⁵ God has placed spiritual leaders (mentors) in community to help walk “alongside of you as a sense of help and encouragement.”¹⁶ These behaviors are identified as “comforting the brokenhearted, supporting the weak, encouraging the discouraged, exhorting those who aren’t motivated, entreating and guiding the misdirected, and warning the rebel and the sinner.”¹⁷

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is known for a model of Christian living.¹⁸ Klaus Issler identified seven key areas of thought from Jesus’ ministry from the Sermon on the Mount for Christian maturity. It would be illuminating to study each section as it could help understand how to live out this kingdom life to spiritual vitality. Issler’s structure of Matthew 5:3 to 7:12 is sectioned: (A) “Matthew 5:3-10, kingdom blessedness; (B) 5:11-16, world influence; (C) 5:17-48, inner righteousness; (D) 6:1-18, God-ward activities; (E) 6:19-34, God-confidence; (F) 7:1-

¹³ Colon, “Incarnational Community-Based Ministry,” 14.

¹⁴ Ron Hawkins and Tim Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor: A Fresh Biblical & Transformational Approach* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2015), 45.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 166.

¹⁷ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 45.

¹⁸ Issler, “Six Themes,” 370.

12. respect; and (G) 7:13-27, an enduring wise lifestyle.”¹⁹ From this outline, Issler developed six formation themes that are: (1) “seeking/loving/depending on God above all. (2) relational (2) relational attachment as Jesus’ church (3) missional participation (4) scriptural saturation (5) inner heart formation [and] (6) two kingdoms discernment.”²⁰

Walter T. Wilson also studied the Sermon on the Mount and discusses the division of themes in Matthew for Christian living. In the first category, he believes Matthew 5:17-48 “offers instruction on how to practice righteousness in one’s relations to others, expounded as an interpretation to the law.”²¹ Wilson adds the second section (Matt 6:1-18), which shows the “communities religious life...to practice their righteousness, not before others, but before your ‘Father in heaven (6:1).”²² The third category (6:19-7:11), is about instruction to one’s “personal wealth” or money, “practicing righteousness with reference to goods” as how Christians measure their treasure.²³

David Hirschman writes about seven *Essentials for a Spiritually Fit Life* and lays out a spiritually fit model in three parts: “(1) Upward essentials; love for God, each other and neighbors and worship (2) Inward essentials; prayer and God’s Word [and] (3) Outward essentials; community, service, and evangelism.”²⁴ Hirschman continues to voice that community is God’s design for His people, who are working out their salvation by “shared

¹⁹ Issler, “Six Themes,” 370.

²⁰ Ibid., 381.

²¹ Walter T. Wilson, “The Third Form of Righteousness: The Theme and Contribution of Matthew 6:19-7:12 in the Sermon on the Mount,” *New Testament Studies* 53, no. 3 (July 2007): 323, accessed June 25, 2017, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ David W. Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, last modified 2015, accessed February 20, 2016, 9.

relationships lived out in groups of believers whose collective focus is on Christ” and, furthermore, “whose commitment is to each other’s spiritual and emotional welfare enabling spiritual health and vitality in the group as a whole and corporately in the church.”²⁵

These essentials help define a foundation for spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth is a continuous process for the journey in life that could be called spiritual formation. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie say spiritual formation could be defined as “the ongoing process of maturing as a Christian, both personally and inter-personally.”²⁶ Furthermore, they state that “spiritual formation can be compared to physical growth via nutrition and exercise. Spiritual growth is dependent on the care and feeding of the soul.”²⁷ Hence, every Christian should focus on Hirschman’s three-part model as an aid in the continuous maturing process. This researcher will also add obedience to his model. Hirschman’s spiritually fit soul model (with obedience added) relies on core essentials for spiritual maturity. These essentials are “(1) God’s Word (2) love (3) worship (4) prayer (5) [obedience] (6) community (7) service and (8) evangelism,” which are markers for the Christians journey to spiritual vitality.²⁸ This unity of relationships intertwines God, others, and keeping the God-minded self on the right path to maturity.

To be spiritually fit, Christians need to be devoted to God’s mission while being knitted in a relationship with the Triune God and others in obedience to Him. From Hirschman’s model, if believers complete this circle, they will be spiritually fit. This researcher added obedience to the list for maturity because without intentionally setting one’s mind on God, they will falter.

²⁵ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 40.

²⁶ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 19.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 9.

These core essentials will align believers in spiritual formation that is mentally, physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually fit for the kingdom of God.

According to Averbeck, a biblical definition of spiritual formation refers to the “Holy Spirit in context of (trans-or con-) forming one’s life towards Christ-likeness (e.g. Gal 4:19).”²⁹ He states it is used interchangeably with “spiritual growth, sanctification and discipleship,” and it is the “shaping...forming work of the Holy Spirit carried out according to the will of God the Father, for the purpose of conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:27-19).”³⁰

Averbeck identifies three dimensions in spiritual formation that form the work of the Holy Spirit (concentric circle), as “(1) Holy Spirit and human spirit (2) temple of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit” and (3) “prophetic spirit and Holy Spirit.”³¹ They are knitted together, working effectively to conform to the image of Christ in the believer. He states that the Holy Spirit works with the human spirit; then, the Holy Spirit inhabits believers “individually and corporately” as the temple of God, and finally the Holy Spirit works in believers “prophetically into this lost and dying world.”³²

Hawkins and Clinton define the shaping of the soul using their holistic model of concentric circles. The modalities in spiritual formation cover areas of the believer’s journey in dimensions for the soul. First is the “Holy Spirit, human spirit, and image of God (2) [the] dysfunctions of the soul...engaged in challenges related to the possession of the thinking, feeling, decisioning, and sinning dimensions of the soul life.”³³ The rest fall under the body

²⁹ Averbeck, “A Spirit, Community, and Mission,” 28.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 30.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hawkins and Clinton, “*The New Christian Counselor*, 79.

dimensions of the soul that “need to take possession of the soul/self in temporal and supernatural relationships” as “sinful self, body self, self in temporal system and self in supernatural system.”³⁴ They say that the overarching goal is “live to love God, love others, and love themselves. In that order.”³⁵

Part 1: RELATE

The first part of this paradigm is through the acrostic RELATE. This means joining in a fellowship group with the body of believers for shared experiences with a communal focus on the Triune God. It is about carrying out God’s mission, relating to others in spiritual fellowship, and engaging in God’s holy work. This approach to soul care restoration is the conjoining of souls in the family of God doing God’s work for a lifetime of love, fellowship, joy, spiritual enlightenment, transformation, healing, nurturing, and encouragement.

There is no set curriculum model in RELATE, but there are eight essentials for a foundational base for people to grow in spiritual formation (practices) to develop spiritual vitality; however, there are Bible studies in the Epistles of John for Part Two: RESTORE in God’s Word for one-on-one guidance with the mentor. No two relationships are alike, as each believer grows differently in his or her giftedness. Furthermore, this transformational approach is based on Jesus’ life and ministry that is embedded into this paradigm for soul care seekers. Bruce Demarest believes that there is “no one brand fits all pattern of growth that accommodates every saint in every respect. Since the sovereign God deals with His children uniquely...no two saints travel identical paths.”³⁶

³⁴ Hawkins and Clinton, “*The New Christian Counselor*, 79.

³⁵ Ibid., 237.

³⁶ Bruce Demarest, “Reflections on Developmental Spirituality: Journey Paradigms and Stages,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 2 (2008): 166, accessed December 10, 2016, Academic OneFile.

There are several basics to Jesus' approach in ministry. First, Jesus was social to get people's attention, but He did not participate in their sin. Second, He was compassionate. Third, He made Himself a servant as He ministered to people's needs. Finally, Jesus ultimately showed God's grace as He forgave sinners; discussed forgiveness of sin, strengthening faith to follow Him, and being disciples for God's mission. Herbert Lockyer says, "His mission to save is embodied in His human name Jesus, which means, 'Jehovah the Savior' (Matt 1:21)" as Lockyer shows in figure 1 an acrostic that "spells our salvation."³⁷

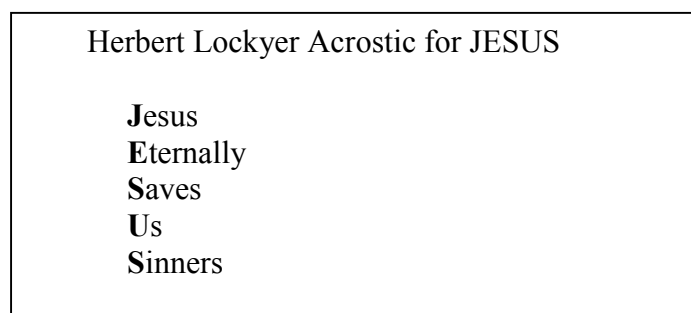


Fig. 1. Herbert Lockyer Acrostic for JESUS

Part One consists of eight core essentials with the acrostic RELATE. These essentials are a must for Christians to mature spiritually in the presence of God. This section will provide "God's Word; love; worship; prayer" and obedience; "community; service and evangelism [mission]."³⁸ Adding community relational soul care as acrostic RELATE with RESTORE for biblical studies in the Epistles of John, all the ingredients for restoring God's people are there to experience spiritual vitality. Figure 2 is an acrostic for Part One RELATE, which shows in detail how RELATE functions to bring believers to spiritual vitality in this soul care paradigm:

³⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Teachings of Jesus* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997), 97.

³⁸ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 9.

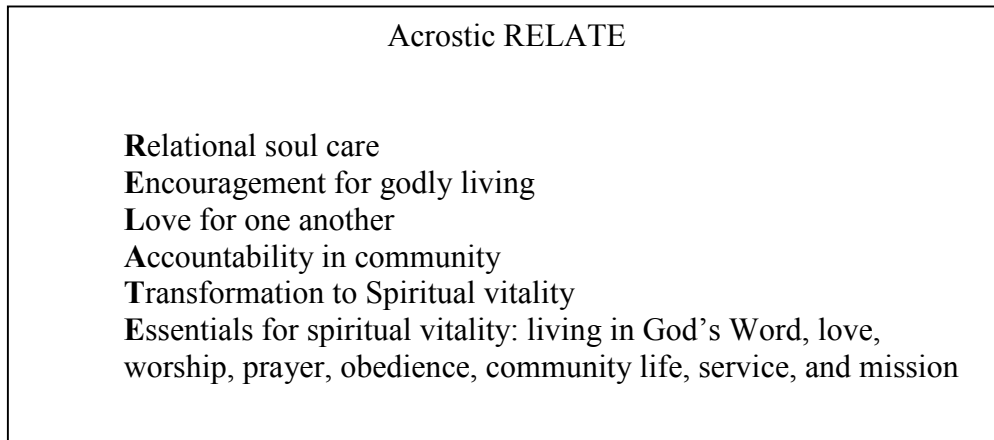


Fig. 2. Acrostic RELATE

Relational Soul Care

Community relational soul care is Jesus' ministry. The believers relate to one another by being social, caring, and compassionate, ministering to their neighbor's needs, and showing God's grace to others. A critical part of a relational paradigm for fellowship is loving God and others.

Relational soul care for others is caring about people's souls during their journey of life. People are broken and they need godly relationships that conjoin in sharing love, encouragement, and hope. So, how does one get to the point of having spiritual vitality? It is a process that takes time because the heart and mind need spiritual transformation.

For spiritual maturity, understanding God attachment from a perspective of how humans seek a love attachment to God is important. From the time people are born, they long to belong. Catherine Hart Weber discusses relational attachments and says, "Our relationship with God and

others” is most important and “we grow and flourish in well-being through relationship attachments with God and one another.”³⁹

People want to be safe, secure, belong, and loved by others in relationships. Hawkins and Clinton say that God “attachment theory helps address the brokenness of self, the brokenness of others, and our broken relationship with God.”⁴⁰ They continue to state that “life is lived in a web of relationships...involves a restoration of shalom,” but they “are central to God’s plan.”⁴¹ Moreover, Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub discuss God attachment, that it starts from infants with a caregiver and from this point on all relationships are formed.⁴² Even if mankind does not admit it, the human soul longs for God and other relationships. According to Clinton and Straub, research suggests that people are “searching not only for who God is but also for their own purpose on this earth.”⁴³ People have a “deepest longing” (searching for a purpose) to know God and to be loved in relationships).⁴⁴ They have a love need to be filled because God created humans for Himself, a relationship “according to the purpose of His Will” (Eph 1: 5).

Joshua Knabb and Matthew Emerson also discuss attachment theories and say there are “four basic attachment principles: secure base, exploration, attachment behaviors, and safe haven” and “integrate the circle of attachment” (connecting to Jesus) with the biblical story of

³⁹ Catherine Hart Weber, “Flourishing in Life Coaching,” in *Transformative Encounters: The Intervention of God in Christian Counseling and Pastoral Care*, ed. George W. Ohlschlager and David W. Appleby (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 329.

⁴⁰ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 124.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachments: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2010), 23.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *A God Centered Church*, 5.

creation.”⁴⁵ Their idea also can be used in a faith community that can share the circle of attachment with other believers. They note that if these four principles were used in the community, Christians could “develop his or her God ‘attachment story,’ and offering a much-needed secure base and safe haven,” as this will move believers “closer towards Jesus Christ as a central attachment figure.”⁴⁶

If one uses the four principles as God attachment theory, the principles could be turned around differently for community relational soul care, as shown in parentheses. It could mean: “secure base” (secure relationships for mentor and community of believers for direction and fellowship); “exploration” (exploring relationships through God’s eyes); “attachment behaviors” (warning of sin/temptation, need to restore right behaviors with God and all others), and “safe haven” (developing intimate relationships with God and others, feeling safe within the boundaries of the Christian circle of attachments).⁴⁷ God attachment is about intimacy with God: living, loving, and shepherding each other in the circle of attachments in community. Furthermore, attachments form a God-bond that cannot be compared to anything else because of the love of the one true God and as His children that live in truth of God’s Word. Therefore, God attachment is a Triune relational bond that leads His children to righteousness for eternal life.

Relational skills can be hard for some people, but if they follow Jesus’ life and ministry, they will learn to be leaders and will help develop formation to have a heart like Christ. Jesus is the chief spiritual leader. In His ministry, one can see how much compassion He had for lost

⁴⁵ Joshua J. Knabb and Matthew Y. Emerson, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People,” *Pastoral Psychol* no. 62 (2013): 828, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

people. His heart was for people as He listened, guided, had empathy, encouraged, healed and led people to follow Him for hope and eternal life.

The apostle Paul was gifted with leadership skills to lead people. Truls Akerlund, who has researched the leadership of Paul, says, “The relational character of Paul’s leadership” on the “emphasis on adaptability and individual consideration highlight the apostle’s relationship with each member” and “individualized care and instructions (cf. Phil. 4:2-3).”⁴⁸ Just like Paul said, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Being a spiritual leader (mentor) to guide people is what all Christians are called to do: the ministry of God to help one another. Christian are also mentored by the Holy Spirit. When care seekers engage in God’s Word and prayer, God is mentoring them along with the caregiver. Also, God sends the community to help for soul care. God gave Moses an assignment to guide His people, but Moses was overwhelmed. Thus, God also gave him “seventy elders” and God said, “I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you” (Num 11:16-17).

Mentors or spiritual leaders in soul care might have to ask deep questions to understand why people are in turmoil or to guide them to God. According to Barton, the “best possible question for us as Christian leaders in light of Jesus’ warning and in light of what we witness in and around us” is the question: “how is it with your soul?”⁴⁹ When someone is asked this question, it is a time for reflection: “The soulful leader pays attention to such inner realities and the questions that they raise” because these questions can stir up the soul to seek God.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Akerlund, “To Live Lives Worthy of God,” 30.

⁴⁹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 24-25.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

Spiritual leaders rely on the Holy Spirit for spiritual direction, which is important for guiding people. Broken people need to be moved into God's spiritual place for an encounter (God's presence). Blackaby and Blackaby say that spiritual leaders must bring people to God to have a "face-to-face encounter with God so they can hear from Him directly;" if they do not, they will not follow Jesus.⁵¹ When people encounter God, they will learn to trust and lean on Him for everything. Furthermore, they will develop a relationship that seeks His Will; then, Christians will be on the journey to spiritual health.

Dave Early and Rod Dempsey say there is a foundation for Christian leaders. There are three themes that mark a good leader as "influence through solid character; vision or direction, and development."⁵² Spiritual leaders must have their own house in order to lead others. Character is also important because they are supposed to be imitators of Christ. Leaders have influence, so they can be dangerous in negative ways.

Ed. Hindson discusses influential leaders and uses Nehemiah as an example for being a visionary. He was a spiritual leader, who had a plan of action for the ruined walls in Jerusalem. He motivated everyone to rebuild the walls in "fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15)" and he "gave them vision, motivation, and a plan of action."⁵³ Nehemiah had influence as a leader from working for the king because he was the royal cupbearer; he was a godly man with character; he saw the walls in ruins and decided to rebuild the walls; and developed a plan of action.

Moreover, Hindson gave five components for vision: "realistic view of the present;

⁵¹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 110.

⁵² Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 195-196.

⁵³ Hindson, *Courageous Faith*, 198.

optimistic view of the future; honest assessment of one's resources; positive attitude about change" and "specific plan of action."⁵⁴

Is character just for leaders like Nehemiah? No, all God's children should develop character for their journey to spiritual maturity. Charlie N. Davidson and Michael C. Whittington note how important character is for a believer's spiritual journey. Being a servant to God and others builds character for maturity. Whittington says that building character is "behaving in certain ways in order to build a virtuous life—a life of character."⁵⁵

Davidson and Whittington also discussed servant leadership. As an example, they explain how Jesus washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17).⁵⁶ Jesus gave His disciples a lesson in servant love for one another; believers need to follow His example. Jesus says, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15).

Moreover, besides vision, influence, character, and plan of action, spiritual leaders lead others to godliness and show them the door to know God in a relationship through His Word. Don Shepson's community model shows that "the most important thing about man is that he is inescapably related to God" and that "God does not exist as a solitary being, but as being in fellowship with others" in a Triune relationship.⁵⁷ He says God made mankind with "spiritual capacity and communal assistance to serve Him and keep His commands" to have an abundant life, so "now they are to be helpers of one another toward godliness, or spiritual formation."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Hindson, *Courageous Faith*, 198-199.

⁵⁵ Michael C. Whittington and Charlie N. Davidson, *Matters of Conscience: A Practical Theology for the Evangelical Chaplain Serving in the United States Military* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2013), 115.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁷ Don Shepson, "A Scriptural Model of Relational Christian Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 9, no.1 (2012): 181, accessed December 1, 2016, Academic OneFile.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

Even today, the Bible still shows God is the chief leader for all soul care. The Exodus model is used to show a paradigm for soul care from the Old Testament Exodus narrative story. Charles DeGroat draws a comparison between Moses as a spiritual leader in the Old Testament and Jesus as the divine leader for the New Exodus in the New Testament. However, God is the one that has cared for the Israelites and all believers today. The oppressed Israel learns a lesson as they are “called to live and love as faithful improvisers of God’s patient love (Exod 22:21). The redeemed are set free to love others in the name of God.”⁵⁹ This model also shows that there is a New Exodus in the New Testament in which Jesus is the “New Joshua” that broke all the chains for sin and slavery.⁶⁰

Charles DeGroat continues to describe the narrative story through the lens of the Old Testament Exodus. It is a map for the New Exodus that lays the groundwork for Jesus, the soul Physician, to guide the way to the New Jerusalem. The Helper (Holy Spirit) will guide one to spiritual health. The believers will have an abundant life when they learn to live and love as faithful, relational children in community with the Holy Spirit. DeGroat’s paradigm from Exodus has “five major sign posts” for understanding soul care that consists of “woundedness, wickedness, purgation, illumination, and union.”⁶¹ Each one of these words are self-explanatory in the spiritual realm for soul care.

Finally, a pioneer in understanding relational soul care, Larry Crabb discusses the importance of understanding people in his community model. He argues that God’s people desire love relationships and that relationships are the key to solutions for all kinds of problems. He

⁵⁹ Charles R. DeGroat, “The New Exodus: A Narrative Paradigm for Understanding Soul Care,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 37, no.3 (Fall 2009): 187, accessed December 1, 2016, Academic OneFile.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 186.

⁶¹ Ibid., 187-192.

says that the qualifications for a spiritual leader must be rooted in Scripture to show that God's love is working in his or her life before he or she can proclaim resurrection power to others.⁶²

Christians need to continually change their inward thoughts for outward godly actions. Crabb states that for change other than "obedience, prayer and time in the Word," everyone is different [because everyone is unique in God's eyes].⁶³ He believes for transformational change that there is not much "clarity how change occurs and what prompts it."⁶⁴ People who have problems (e.g. not getting along or behavior issues) usually are dealing with a relational model in some aspect. When there is encouragement and affirmation from caregivers, they can help guide troubled Christians to the solution for "unsatisfactory relationships."⁶⁵ This is where community relational soul care sets the path for loving one another to Christian maturity. It begins with a right relationship with God and love and encouragement from others; then, the brokenhearted will flourish in their time.

Encouragement

There are many verses in the Bible for encouragement for living a godly life. When God's children are living a God-centered life; they will grow in spiritual maturity. To live according to the Word of God, one must look to Romans 2:12, where God's people are told, "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" and transformation is by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:1-2). Furthermore, Scripture says to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Col 3:1). When a Christ-

⁶² Lawrence Crabb and Larry Crabb, *Understanding People: Deep Longing for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 79.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 81-84.

follower seeks God's ways, His Word is encouragement. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 states, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."

Greg Ogden says that the "primary goal of the Christian life is to reach the state of maturity in Christ."⁶⁶ Glorifying God is the overarching goal that leads to maturity. Ogden also states that the "root of the word for 'maturity' in Greek is *telos*, which means 'end' or 'goal.'"⁶⁷ Hence, the end goal for Christians is to be like Christ, fully mature glorifying the Triune God (1 Cor 6:19, 20; 10:31). The Apostle Paul clearly states that the mature Christian will "impart wisdom" (1 Cor 2:6). Furthermore, Colossians 1:28 says, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

To be like Christ, believers need to follow the examples of Jesus. Luke 19:10 says that Jesus came "to seek and to save the lost." This is one role for the mentor and community soul caregivers to lead people to Christ so He can heal them. People often go astray or have trials with illness, grief, trauma, loneliness or other common hardships.

Therefore, Christians need to be encouragers to those who are hurting in their community, but they must seek out everyone (even unbelievers) to help bring them to Jesus so that they can experience His love and forgiveness. Blackaby and Blackaby say that to be like Christ, "each member who walks with the Lord...will be encouraging, teaching, and being 'concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works' (Heb 10:24)."⁶⁸

Love for One Another

⁶⁶ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby, *The God-Centered Church*, 95.

One of the most important things people seek is a love relationship with God and other people. The greatest commandment is to love God and the second is to “love one another” (John 13:35; 15:12, 17; 2 John 1:5; Eph 4:2; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 2:17). It is all about relationships; loving God should be a natural response of the heart because God “first loved us” (1 John 4:19). He loved mankind so much, He sent His Son to suffer and die for man’s sins. All humans will have suffering at some point as it is common to man (1 Cor 10:13; Job 5:7); yet, the suffering was never meant to be alone. It is about loving in an intimate relationship with God (inward focus), sharing experiences (outward focus) with others, while developing a healthy, God-minded self with a goal to glorify God (Godward focus), and go and make disciples. When a believer has inward, outward, and Godward focus, it will all lead to spiritual vitality as shown in figure 3.

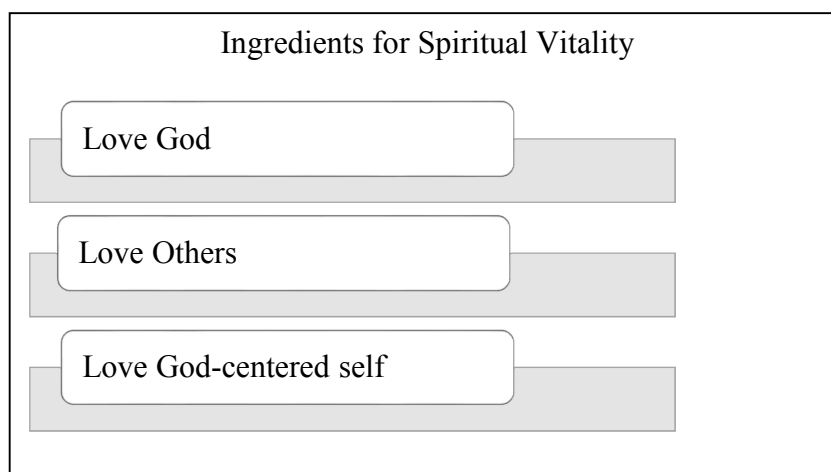


Fig. 3. Ingredients for Spiritual Vitality

The whole Bible is a story of God’s love for mankind, and the focus is the love for God, and the heart of that love outflows to others (Matt 22:37-39), stemming from a God-centered self. The Christian life is about love. Bill Hull talked about “love is life’s most powerful force”

and his definition is “love in its boldest form: [is] an action designed for the benefit of another.”⁶⁹ Love for one another in community is called soul care friends or spiritual friends.

James M. Houston also talks about loving spiritual friends and says, “spiritual friendship is friendship in the company of Christ...a soul friend gives guidance,” his example is like a “comfortable walking with God.”⁷⁰ Houston walks his readers through the importance of spiritual friends because they are examples of mutual love. Spiritual friendships are God’s ambassadors that are knit together with love who are invited to share their “insights breaking the bread of truth together,” but the depth of spiritual friends has no “biography.”⁷¹

Furthermore, Karen Scheib says that the “Christian life is marked by ongoing participation in the process of redemption through which all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social, are transformed by God’s grace, the essence which is love.”⁷² Christian love is only possible because God loved His children first (1 John 4:19). Scheib writes that love is “relational and is learned in individual and communal relationships.”⁷³ So, Christians need to grow in love, and this love spreads to all mankind, not just in community. David Benner remarks that “growth in love always involves movement beyond the hardened boundaries of the isolated self to the selves-in-relationship that make up community...[and] always points us toward fellow human being, not simply toward God.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 154.

⁷⁰ James M. Houston, *Joyful Exiles: Life of Christ on the Dangerous Edge of Things* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 167.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷² Karen Scheib, “Love is a Starting Place for Pastoral Theological Reflection,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 5-6 (2014): 705, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/article/10.1007%2Fs11089-014-0614-4>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 705.

⁷⁴ David G. Benner, *Surrender to Love*, 89.

Everett Worthington, Jr. developed a LOVE acrostic for communication in relationships. Although he designed it for marital therapy, figure 4 can be adapted for other types of relationships. All relationships need communication and evaluation to mature as he illustrates in the LOVE acrostic.⁷⁵

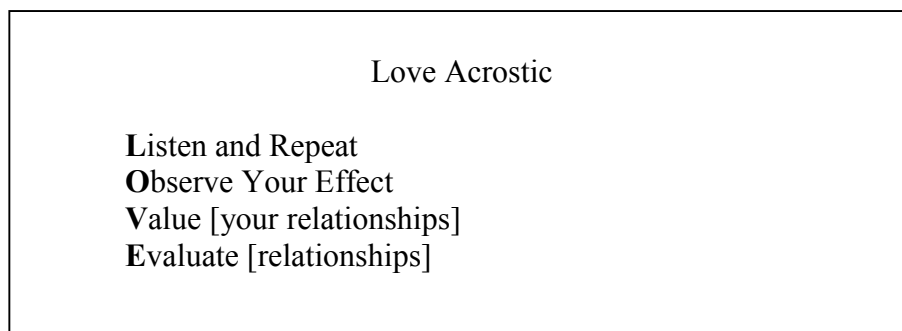


Fig. 4. Love Acrostic

Lack of communication in relationships show love is a problem. One cannot convey love if he or she cannot communicate and connect with others. John Maxwell is an expert in the field of leadership, accountability, influence, and communication. He says whether for a one-on-one, a group or an audience, the “three nonverbal ways” for communication are: “connect visually” (attention, setting example, smiling), “connect intellectually” (listening, investing in people’s growth, give time to think), and “connect emotionally” (physical touch within boundaries, honoring groups effort, and through facial expressions).”⁷⁶

Accountability

⁷⁵ Everett Worthington, Jr., *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005, 79.

⁷⁶ John Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates Few Connect* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 70-71.

The accountably mindset is sometimes a hard subject for anyone rebelling against God's ways. Jesus was always accountable to the Father. As God's children, believers are accountable also to the Triune community and towards others. Being accountable means many things. Greg Ogden states that "mutual accountability is authority given to others to hold us accountable to mutually agreeable standards."⁷⁷ Being accountable to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and living in humility and gratitude brings God's presence of peace and rest.

For spiritual leaders, Blackaby and Blackaby say, "the responsibility of leading people carries with it a frightening sense of accountability (2 Cor 5:9-11)."⁷⁸ When believers follow the commands of Christ, they will have a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:8) and the Father will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:23). This is the relational rest and peace (shalom) that is sought after by God's children.

Siang-Yang Tan believes "we all long for relational rest in our relationships with one another...fellowship with each other, founded on prayer, open sharing, forgiveness, support, and accountability-spiritual community-will help us experience more relational rest and wholeness" that leads to spiritual vitality.⁷⁹ There is a condition for relational rest because this will not happen if there is no change or transformation to the mind, body and spirit. Shalom (peace) and rest are only found in Christ.

Transformation

It is hard for people to change for many reasons. Transformation means change. Gary Collins talks about the difficulty of change and that there are "two broad categories of change"

⁷⁷ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to building your life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21.

⁷⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 176.

⁷⁹ Siang-Yang Tan, *Full Service*, 106.

that community caregivers need to be aware of.⁸⁰ He says it is “reactive change” that has a “reaction to some event or situation in life...and proactive change...changes we are trying to make happen.”⁸¹ The reactive change is probably the most common for people who have turmoil in trials from trauma, grief, depression, financial, or “conflicts, loneliness, or the need to make important decisions.”⁸² This can affect a person emotionally, mentally, physically, relationally, and spirituality.

Averbeck discusses transformation for the spiritual journey for believers and shows three themes of the work of the Holy Spirit: “(1) transformation, (2) community and fellowship,” and (3) “God’s glory to other people (mission)” as the Holy Spirit refines His children in trials “in us, among us, and through us.”⁸³ Transformation can only be a work from the Holy Spirit.

John Sanford discusses a model for transformational change for God’s people that his father developed because he discovered his church members did not experience inner healing. He found ideas in a survey from a seminary about what young adults were learning in Sunday school from the Scripture that says, “God reconciled us to Himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:18). John Sanford felt that God’s people “ignored... the context ‘be reconciled to God’ (2 Cor 5:20). Christ has completed the work in saving us (John 19:30), but we are in the process of being transformed ‘being made holy (Heb 10:14).’”⁸⁴ Sanford set out on what could be done to help the process for the community to experience inner healing.

⁸⁰ Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 7.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Averbeck, “A Spirit, Community, and Mission,” 30.

⁸⁴ John Sandford, “Elijah House Model for Inner Healing,” in *Transformative Encounters: The Intervention of God in Christian Counseling and Pastoral Care*, ed. George W. Ohlschlager and David W. Appleby (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 49.

Sandford's father discovered that there are "four basic laws" that are "prerequisite for effective change" and named this model "Elijah House Model for Inner Healing."⁸⁵ He knew that "Christ's sacrifice alone satisfies the requirements of the law," but he resurrected a care model with four verses to study for effective change.⁸⁶ He used Galatians 6:7 ("sowing and reaping"); Deuteronomy 5:16 ("honoring mother and father"); Matthew 7:2 ("reap from our judgments...bitter root judgments...and expectancies...foundational lies and inner vows"); and Hosea 8:7 ("law of increase...what we sow is multiplied)," whether it is good or bad.⁸⁷ The conclusion, Sandford found that once his church members studied in depth, these verses will bring out the sinful condition of the soul and God's people will experience change for "inner healing and deliverance."⁸⁸ He concluded that getting rid of sin, which is the root of the problem(s) was the cure.

Wheeler and Whaley discuss the words for change as it "means to 'change the figure or to be transformed'" or "to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place."⁸⁹

Transformation means change, and love is the motivation for change.

Kellerman believes there is only one "type of love" that "completely changes us, grace love."⁹⁰ It is the love from the Father, so one must come into God's presence. It is "our spiritual existence that revolves around the Son (and His grace) ...and gospel of grace is the center point" for all Christians.⁹¹ When sin entered the world and changed man, only grace could change the

⁸⁵ Sandford, "Elijah House Model," 50.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 50-51.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship: Biblical Principles for Worship-Based Evangelism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 82.

⁹⁰ Robert Kellerman, *Soul Physicians* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2007), 44.

⁹¹ Ibid., 46.

heart to be restored to wholeness for a love relationship back to the Father. The heart can be deceived, but the gospel of grace is the “message of unfathomable love and grace that speaks of a God who pursues the fallen sinner and rebellious saint to the darkest corners” and “it is a story of God’s insistence and pursuit, and of His refusal to surrender us to our sins.”⁹²

Robert Kellerman also believes spiritual friends need to stay connected to the relational God. Kellerman says to apply “grace” first, as it reflects the “source of true connection, Christ’s mercy; nature of true connection, the Spirit’s generous sharing,” and the “power of connecting, the Father’s influence.”⁹³ Figure 5 reveals Kellerman’s “acronym for GRACE.”⁹⁴

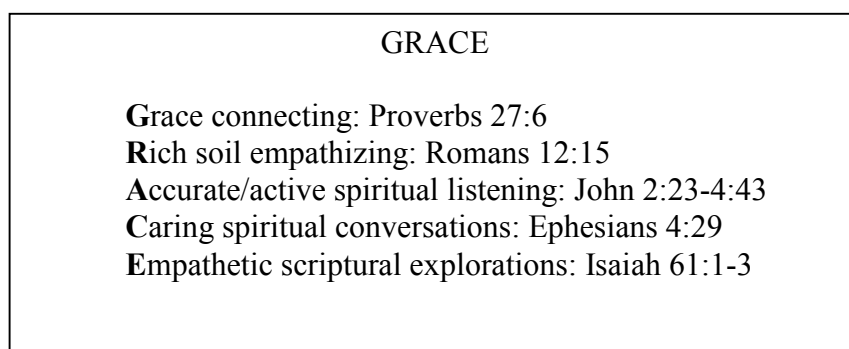


Fig. 5. GRACE

The objects of God’s grace: “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8); “access by faith into this grace” (Rom 5:2); “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7); and to teach or instruction as

⁹² Ron Hawkins, Edward Hindson, and Timothy Clinton, “Pastoral Care and Counseling,” in *Competent Christian Counseling*, ed. Timothy Clinton and George Ohlschlager (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 405.

⁹³ Robert Kellerman, *Spiritual Friends* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2005), 112.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

“training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:12).

Darrell Bock says that Ephesians 2:8-11 “teaches us not only that salvation is by grace through faith...but that salvation teaches that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that God designed that we may walk in them.”⁹⁵ He goes on to express the reason why “God saved us,” as it is so that “we would live differently in the experience of His grace. It is part of the divine design for transformation.”⁹⁶

Furthermore, Eric Johnson discusses the Holy Spirit’s role in salvation, for the eschatological hope is that “the Spirit is a sign of full redemption” as the “Spirit is the [down payment] process of transformation now under way in the believer which will climax in the transformed resurrection.”⁹⁷ The blessing from the Triune God is the promise for all Christians to experience the Holy Spirit who take up residence inside the believer’s heart. This is where the love relationship is in perfect union with the human spirit and Holy Spirit as the continuing transformation is being ignited by the love of God, to God and from God. This experience is for all Christians in the “life of God residing in the human soul as its home and possession,” and this comes with the “participation of God.”⁹⁸

Many Christian scholars have researched obstacles to transformation in community. One study was conducted by G. Michael Leffel who analyzed how emotions in spiritual transformation play a part for a holistic approach. He discussed how religious conversation

⁹⁵ Darrell Bock, “Embracing Jesus in a First Century Context: What Can It Teach Us About Spiritual Commitment?” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 2 (2010): 138, accessed December 1, 2016, Academic OneFile.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 402.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 402.

affects moral emotional “transformation in the relational spirituality paradigm.”⁹⁹ His task was to analyze “how persons expand their explicit capacity for mature relationality.”¹⁰⁰ His findings concluded that there were levels of relational spiritual transformation, but the degree of transformation was unclear. He believes moral emotions motivate people.¹⁰¹ This behavior, usually affects God’s people socially to help others in need because their heart is right.

Leffel also says in another article that he believes moral emotions guide religious conversation: “A growing body of scholarship points to the importance of emotions in prosocial action...the emerging picture seems to be that positive and moral emotions are part of the moral decision and judgment-making apparatus that leads to prosocial action.”¹⁰² The problem arises when the understanding on either side does not have the purity of heart for God or others. Leffel states that the confusion is “when purity of intention (love of God) is demanded of man without a compassionate and workable psychological knowledge of everything in the individual human being that resists or covers over such purity of heart.”¹⁰³

Purity of heart in transformation can only evolve by having an intimate relationship with God. It is an ongoing transforming relationship with the Holy Spirit (Advocate, Helper, Counselor) who will guide the soul caregiver, mentor (spiritual leader), and seeker. God desires a love relationship with His children. He commissions His disciples as transformed servants to build up His church and do His will. They are empowered with His Spirit, gathering together

⁹⁹ Michael G. Leffel, “Emotion and Transformation in the Relational Spirituality Paradigm Part 2. Implicit Morality and ‘Minimal Prosociality,’” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 4 (2007): 281, accessed December 28, 2016. Academic OneFile.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Michael G. Leffel, “Emotion and Transformation in the Relational Spirituality Paradigm Part 3. A Moral Motive Analysis,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 298, accessed December 28, 2016. Academic OneFile.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 298.

with God's glory, as a light shining in the darkened world. Peter states that when believers come to Jesus, they are "like living stones" who "are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). This holy priesthood is living and proclaiming God's Word so "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in God's Word

God's Word is perfect (Ps 18:30), pure (Ps 119:140), and provides protection (Ps 30:5) for those who love Him (2 Sam 22:31). When a believer is in a "personal relationship with God...it is a living ongoing relationship of love!"¹⁰⁴ God's Word is Spirit-breathed, as told in 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Also, the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God like a sword as told in Ephesians 6: 17, "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" to "convict you of sin...all truth...all things" for "remembrance all that Christ" told His believers for His "will and call on your life (John 14:26; 16: 7-15)."¹⁰⁵

Darrell Bock discusses the oral reading of the Word of God. In the Old Testament, the person (other than a prophet, dreams, or visions to individuals) heard the Word of God from a speaker.¹⁰⁶ In the New Testament, hearing the Word of God is less clear because they met "in the temple and from house to house...[and] apostle's teachings and to fellowship" (Acts 2:42; 5:42). One example for reading of Scripture, was Jesus' readings from the scrolls in Isaiah 61:1-2

¹⁰⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 181.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel L. Bock, "That They May Hear: Biblical Foundations for the Oral Reading of Scripture in Worship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 9, 11, accessed March 2, 2017, Academic OneFile.

(Luke 4:16-20) and gave His comment after He sat down that “Today this Scripture is filled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).¹⁰⁷ Bock’s concerns are how Christians today encounter the Scriptures in worship. Some say worship is only music and not Scripture, so what is true worship? Bock designed a paradigm for communal worship:

The Western evangelical church has lost both the passion for and the art of reading Scripture orally in worship...In the ancient world, all sacred texts were written to be read orally and heard by an audience. Because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), in hearing the Scriptures read we hear the voice of God himself...In addition to hearing the Scriptures read, early Christians were encouraged to sing or recite the Psalms to each other (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16)...First, evangelicals must rediscover that in hearing the Scriptures worshipers hear the voice of God...Second, evangelicals need to rediscover the transforming power of Scripture...Third evangelicals must rediscover the joy of a catholic [universal] reading and hearing of Scripture.¹⁰⁸

Darrell Bock continues to voice that in “Hearing Scripture in worship is a communal enterprise...[as] the prayer of the Lord ...and Aaronic benediction...are divinely ordained.”¹⁰⁹ Also, believers should be so familiar with God’s Word that when a crisis happens, they will find “strength and inspiration through fellowship in the sufferings and delights of God’s people.”¹¹⁰

Houston noted that when the early Christians sang or recited the songs together; they “were songs of praise and worship that help to assure us of God’s goodness and to focus our lives upon Him. These prayers consolidate our experiences of God.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, the Psalms “strengthen our attitudes, deepen our convictions, strengthen our faith, and provide us with the language we need to express our praise to God. Praise and worship belong to ...God alone.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Bock, “That They May Hear,” 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 9, 11-17.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Houston, *The Prayer*, 115.

¹¹² Ibid.

Many of the Psalms provide an overarching umbrella for praise and worship, but they also provide a foundation for living a Christian life to maturity and in worshiping God in His Word.

John MacArthur states, “God’s Word commands every professing Christian to examine his or her life to see if the salvation that is claimed is actually authentic (2 Cor 13:5),” and if it is, there will be spiritual signs in “attitude and behavior,” since these “attitudes” are the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23).¹¹³ This is the character or righteousness of God that hinges on love. Also, if a person does not know the Word of God, he or she will not have power of the Spirit (Matt 22:29) and be in err.

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Love for God, God’s Love

Blackaby and Blackaby say that “Koinonia is a practical expression of God’s love towards His people...Koinonia is agape love in action.”¹¹⁴ Galatians 5:22-23, reveals the fruit of the Spirit and states, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,” but the spiritual fruit starts with the word “love.” Love is the number one fruit that the Spirit wants believers to know and put in action because love is the essence of God Himself. The Spirit empowers believers. Furthermore, by this love, believers are to share in the glory of God (2 Thess 2:4). *Maclaren’s Expositions* discusses how love is the foundation in the fruit of the Spirit:

The first of these three triads include love, joy, and peace... all three lies in the Christian relation to God. They regard nothing but God and our relation to Him...they are simply the results of communion with God... Love...the foundation and moving principle of all the rest. It is the instinctive act of the higher life and is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is the life sap which rises through the tree and given form to all the clusters...they are a rich variety of graces, of conduct and character, is thought of as one.

¹¹³ John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John*, 54.

¹¹⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *A God-Centered Church*, 29.

The individual members are not isolated graces, but all connected, springing from one root and constituting an organic whole.¹¹⁵

The Christian character should be a heart of love for God. David Hirschman makes a point about loving God, as it “should be a natural response of the heart, because of God the Spirit and what He does (Rom 8:9. 11, 14, 16, 26-27); God the Son and what He does (Heb 7:24-25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1; 1 Tim 2:5);” and “God the Father what He does (John 6:44; Gal 4:4-5; Rom 8:29-32; Phil 1:6).”¹¹⁶ God has always loved His children, which is why He always pursues them to be restored to Himself (2 Cor 5:18). Love is a starting point for the action of God. He loves His children with an “everlasting love, and drawn you with loving kindness” (Jer 31:3). God wants their love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37).

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Worship

What is worship? Worship can only happen if the Triune community is present; it is the divine presence of the Lord manifested in the believer. The Holy Spirit is always active in the body of believers, if the Spirit is allowed in. David Wheeler and Vernon Whaley say, “worship is transformational...[and] transformation is a ministry of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁷ Transformational worship happens when a believer prays, spends time in the presence of God, and reads His Word. According to Wheeler and Whaley, worship happens “when we share our encounter with God and others.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Alexander Maclaren, *Maclaren's Expositions*, “Galatians 5:22,” last modified 2016, accessed July 1, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/galatians/5-22.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 12-13.

¹¹⁷ Wheeler and Whaley, *The Great Commission to Worship*, 81, 92.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

There are many examples of people in the Bible who cried out to God to help them in some way, so crying out to God can be a form of worship. When a believer, lifts their soul in prayer to the heavenly Triune community in times of trouble, it is worship. David was appointed literal king; however, he was also the king of laments in the Old Testament.

The Bible is filled with people in trials that cried out to the Lord, including Jesus. They are people who needed God; this is no different for His children today. Most of the book of Psalms are laments that look to God for answers. There are other examples: “sons of Israel” (Exod 2:23, 14:10); Moses (Exod 17:4); Samuel (1 Sam 7:9); Elijah (1 Kgs 17:20); Jabez (1 Chr 4:10) Israelites (1 Chr 5:20); David (Ps 4:1; 54:1-3; 61:1; 64:1; 108:1); and Jesus (Matt 27:46). Hannah grieved over not having a child, so when she was in the temple, she cried out to the Lord in her trial. This story is told in 1 Samuel 1:10: “She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.” She made a vow (1 Sam 1:11) with the Lord and the Lord heard, responded, granted her petition (1 Sam 1:27), and in return gave her a son named Samuel that she dedicated back to God.

Almost one-half of the Psalms are laments that could be referenced for “transformation of sorrow” discussed by Logan C. Jones, as they are “honest engagement and dialogue with God, within a covenantal relationship where hurt and pain are acknowledged” and not simply dismissed.¹¹⁹ Laments are where pain and hurt have a voice and “hope for transformation...that are liberating, redeeming and life-giving.”¹²⁰

Jones uses Brueggemann's books and articles about laments in the Psalms to proclaim their power to help people. Brueggemann uses a three-way model from “orientation of the

¹¹⁹ Logan C. Jones, “The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 61, no. 1-2 (2007): 47, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://journals.sagepub.com>.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 49.

problem” [apply the lament], “disorientation” [apply praise and worship] and “new orientation” [action is changed new life].¹²¹ He goes on to say that the laments in the Psalms “tutor us in the language of prayer; they teach us new ways of praying and more expressive ways of articulating our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows.”¹²² The Psalms of lament apply to soul care today because they are “(1) universal feelings and experiences (2) mostly non-specific about the circumstances,” and distressed believers can apply their own words after the lament in prayer.¹²³

There has been interest in the New Testament for laments. While these New Testaments laments are not exactly formal laments, they do have a case for a lament. A biblical lament is a prayer, but it needs to have a “distressful complaint/question/appeal directed towards God [a prayer] in order to work change, for a real or perceived problem.”¹²⁴

Rebecca Eklund believes that there are laments from Jesus, “(1) as God (2) human as a prophet, priest and king,” but a New Testament lament “incorporates the pattern of the Old Testament lament into its proclamation of the gospel, especially in the person of Jesus Christ as He prayed and embodies lament.”¹²⁵

Andrew Hassler agrees with Eklund and gives function to a “three-fold classification” for a New Testament lament: “(1) references, a lament that the reader does not know content, (2) fragments, isolated petitions [and] (3) allusions, refer to Old Testament laments.”¹²⁶ He believes

¹²¹ Jones, “The Psalms of Lament,” 50.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁴ Hassler, “Glimpses of Lament,” 166.

¹²⁵ Rebecca Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus’ Laments in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 170.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 67.

there is a lament in “2 Corinthians 1:8-11, the sentence of death; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, groaning in this earthly tent; [and] 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, a thorn in the flesh.”¹²⁷

This is a newer addition to knitting soul care with laments to help believers heal and grow in understanding the process of pain and fear. There are many classic laments in the Old Testament. From Jesus’ life and ministry, there are examples of New Testament prayers for laments: the “Garden of Gethsemane...death of Lazarus...and lament from the cross.”¹²⁸ Laments are just another way to get through the trials of life; moreover, His children have direct access to Jesus through prayer.

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Prayer

Prayer is essential in the life of a believer. Abiding in Jesus can only be done through prayer. Jesus was a prime example praying to the Father. He prayed to the Father for strength and for all those who believed in Him. In Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, He prays a circle of prayer as (1) “to be glorified” (John 17:1-5), (2) for His disciples (John 17: 6-19) and (3) for all believers (John 17:20-26). Furthermore, Jesus used His parable of the vine and the branches, which includes the branches fruit (John 15). Houston says the fruit is for the believers, and in John 17, Jesus widens His prayer to ones who will “believe the gospel” and be in union with one another as Jesus is with the Father.¹²⁹ Jesus’ prayer is also for His believes to continue to know the Father and Him.

Prayer is an offering up of one’s earthly desires to God for all things lawful and needed, with humble confidence that believers shall obtain them through the meditations of our LORD

¹²⁷ Eklund, *Jesus Wept*, 167-175.

¹²⁸ Ibid., vii-viii.

¹²⁹ James M. Houston, *The Prayer: Deepen Your Friendship with God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communication Ministries, 2007), 218.

and Savior Jesus Christ. Prayer is a holy privilege made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the saints' behalf. Table 1.1 shows the twenty elements of prayer from Scripture:¹³⁰

Table 1.1 Twenty Elements of Prayer

1. Ask in prayer	Matt 7:7; John 14:14, 15:7
2. Earnest prayer	in the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:26
3. Praying in persecution	Matt 5:44
4. Answers to prayer	Mark 11:24; Ps 65:2
5. Mandate to prayer	Luke 18:1
6. Power in prayer	Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18
7. Pray without doubting	1 Tim 2:8
8. Effectual prayer	Jas 5:16
9. Response to prayer	Ps 102:17
10. Pray unto God	Acts 12:5; Ps 5:1-3; Job 33:26
11. Pray in my name (Jesus)	John 14:13; 16: 23, 26
12. Pray always	Eph 6:18; Luke 18:1
13. Pray without ceasing	1 Thess. 5:17
14. Pray three times a day	Ps 55:17
15. Continue in prayer	Col. 4:2
16. Pray in public	Acts 1:14
17. Pray everywhere	1 Tim. 2: 8
18. Thanksgiving prayer	Phil. 4:6

¹³⁰ Julie Larsen, "Bible Readings on Prayer," *Shepherd's Gate Mission's, Inc.*, last modified July 1, 2017, accessed July 1, 2017, <http://shepherdsgate.ipower.com/shepherdsgatemissions/31801.html>.

19. Community prayers	Acts 12:12
20. Praying together	Matt 18:20; Acts 1:14, 2:42

John MacArthur also discussed prayer in John 14:14, “Jesus explained that both He...and the Father (15:16; 16:23) will give answers” and “they will supply whatever His abiding people ask, praying in His name (15:16). To ask in Jesus’ name is to ask in harmony with His will as indicated in His Word.”¹³¹ One is to ask according to His Will. Praying moves a person in the presence of God, face-to-face. It is the throne of grace that is most holy. Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, so He taught them what is known as the Lord’s Prayer. In table 1.2 Hirschman designed a pattern for prayer from the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15.¹³²

Table 1.2 Pattern for the Lord’s Prayer

<i>Relationship:</i>	“Father, which art in heaven”
<i>Worship:</i>	“Hallowed be thy name”
<i>Priority:</i>	“Thy kingdom come” (<i>God’s plan first</i>)
<i>Acceptance:</i>	“Thy will be done” (<i>of the will of God</i>)
<i>Requests:</i>	“Give us this day our daily bread” (<i>daily needs</i>)
<i>Admission/Confession:</i>	“Forgive us our debts” (<i>of sin</i>)
<i>Submission:</i>	“And lead us not” (<i>to God’s leading</i>)
<i>Closing:</i>	“For thine is the kingdom” (<i>focus on God</i>)

¹³¹ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 132.

¹³² Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 29.

Without a life of prayer, it can literally make one unhealthy and unprotected. Prayer is so important because it connects believers to God through the Holy Spirit. It is also protection from the evil one. Houston believes prayer “gives us a lifeline to another realm, a realm to the Father and to the Son” and believers “need prayer to make us holy.”¹³³ Prayer is the connection to the God and it is the only lifeline with which a Christian connects to the Triune God for a relationship. Prayer is also intercessory. Through research, “scholars have discovered time spent in prayer and engagement in similar religious experiences (meditation, reading of Scripture, etc.) related positively to a variety of measures (life satisfaction and general happiness seeking meaning in life, and existential well-being).”¹³⁴

When prayer is “practiced in an environment of spiritual friendships,” it “can bring growth and fruitfulness back to our Christian lives; therefore, “grace, love and fellowship” are the beating of the heart of God for prayer in community.¹³⁵ All fellowship groups are a means to join in prayer for praise, thanksgiving, worship toward God, and praying for one another.

Peter Jankowski and Steven Sandage say that people “who regularly prayed with others in religious groups tended to report this helped them forgive others and heal broken relationships.”¹³⁶ Prayer and forgiveness for an individual or in community are very important. Jesus commanded His believers to forgive one another (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32; Matt 18:35). He even prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

¹³³ Houston, *The Prayer*, 217.

¹³⁴ David B. Simpson et al., “The Relationship of Religious Participation to Relationship with God,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28, no. 4 (2009): 362, accessed August 3, 2016, *Academic OneFile*.

¹³⁵ Houston, *The Prayer*, 289.

¹³⁶ Peter J. Jankowski and Steven Sandage, “Meditative Prayer, Hope, Adult Attachment, and Forgiveness: A Proposed Model,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 3, no. 2 (2011): 115, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

Praying for one another brings shalom to the soul, which brings harmony and unity. Forgiveness is also crucial for a healthy soul.

Everett L. Worthington and Michael Scherer also talk about negative health outcomes when people do not forgive one another. Forgiveness is medicine for soul. Negative emotional thoughts can change people's behaviors and these negative thoughts can produce unforgiveness, which is a "stress reaction."¹³⁷ They have concluded that there are four principles for "unforgiveness, emotional forgiveness, and health."¹³⁸ They say (1) "unforgiveness is stressful (2) coping mechanisms...can reduce unforgiveness (3) forgiveness reduces the stress of unforgiveness" and (4) "forgiveness as a coping strategy is related to health."¹³⁹

Griffin, Lavelock and Worthington say that Christians in community are "empowered by the Holy Spirit...that the body of believers may emulate divine forgiveness by extending interpersonal forgiveness to one another in order to preserve unity amidst diversity and conflict (Eph. 4:1-6)."¹⁴⁰ Forgiving is like seeing first hand a part of redemption and in "forgiving others, we experience life in true Christian community, which functions as a foretaste of eternal life spent alongside our creator within the body of believers."¹⁴¹

Worthington talks about two types of forgiveness: "decisional forgiveness (making a decision not to seek revenge) and emotional forgiveness (change of heart replacing negative with

¹³⁷ Everett L. Worthington and Michael Scherer, "Forgiveness Is an Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy That Can Reduce Health Risks and Promote Health Resilience: Theory, Review, and Hypotheses," *Psychology & Health* 19, no. 3 (June 2004): 386-387, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 388.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Brandon J. Griffin, Caroline R. Lavelock, and Worthington, Everett L. Jr., "On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Healing Through Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 3 (Fall, 2014): 253, 256, access February 5, 2017, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 255.

positive emotions).”¹⁴² Through these two types of forgiveness, people make decisions. Most of the time, there is no forgiveness because forgiving is too painful to deal with.

One very important thing to remember is that negative thinking always produces disconnected thoughts and unforgiveness generates negative thoughts. Believers could renew the mind (Rom 12:2) every time a negative thought comes into focus. A simple solution is to change one’s mind to something else until there is a better time to deal with the problem; however, a better solution is thinking positive thoughts instead of negative thoughts. Positive thoughts can come from something that will change the mind to godly direction. Anyone can change how he or she thinks. Thinking positively produces positive results. Figure 6 shows Worthington’s acrostic for forgiveness called REACH:¹⁴³

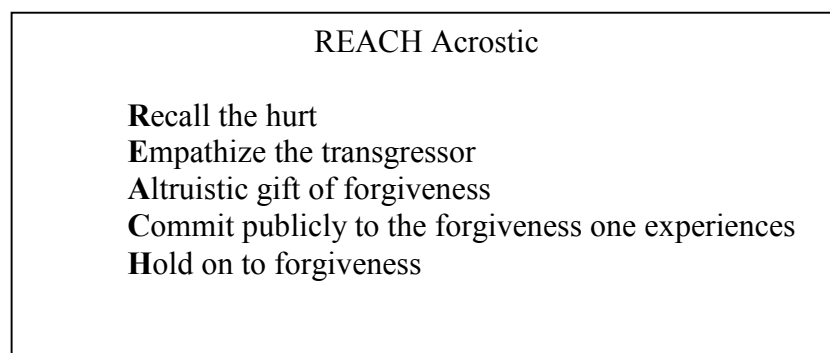


Fig. 6. REACH Acrostic

Forgiveness is important in the Christian walk since everyone has a part in forgiveness, from the person asking for forgiveness to the person forgiving. Jesus asks His believers to forgive one another (Matt 6:14; Eph 4:32), even seven times a day (Luke 17:4). Forgiving is also

¹⁴² Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “Helping People Forgive: Getting to the Heart of the Matter,” in *Caring for People God’s Way*, ed. Tim Clinton, Archibald Hart, and George Ohlschlager (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 121-125.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 126-130.

praying for that person's soul that offended, whether that person repents or not. Through counseling experience, this researcher has observed that the majority of the time people do not go to the person they have offended. The offender might tell God he or she is sorry, but not the one he or she offended. True spiritual confession is going to the person one has offended and asking for forgiveness (Matt 18:21,22). God's children are called to be Christ's ambassadors, so they need to exemplify Christ's character by living God-fearing lives. They must show that they forgive others and accept forgiveness from others in return so they can be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20) because "Christ's now controls us" (2 Cor 5:14).

Henri Nouwen suggests that from Jesus' ministry, there are "three disciplines we are called to practice on the long journey home," and they are "(solitude) prayer at night, (formed His) community in the morning and ministry in the afternoon [healing people]."¹⁴⁴ Jesus went about His ministry with "power, love, and discipline," as it states in Scripture, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."¹⁴⁵ Jesus' earthly ministry is an example for His believers to follow.

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Obedience

James Houston believes there is a real problem for living in obedience. The problem does not come from a lack of "knowledge of the faith, but the spiritual determination to carry out what we already know."¹⁴⁶ It is why obedience is hard; the flesh is weak (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38), and "the call for obedience to the word of the Lord" is not easy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 110,

¹⁴⁵ I Timothy 1:7, New American Standard Bible (Glassport, PA: Biblehub.com, 2016).

¹⁴⁶ Houston, *Joyful Exiles*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Obedience, or discipline, is part of the maturity process for Christians. If one is faithfully living out his or her Christian walk, then one will see the fruit in that person. Greg Ogden says self-discipline is important; it is “what you should do when you should, the way you should, where you should and for the correct reasons” and “[praying] that the Holy Spirit will enable your new nature to overcome your old nature in this battle.”¹⁴⁸

Bill Hull also believes that God’s people need disciplines working in the believer’s heart to transform the “hearts desire to follow Jesus and in humility to submit [themselves]...to the practice of the disciplines in community,” and as a result, “discipline and accountability” transforms believers “into the image of Christ.”¹⁴⁹

Jesus emphasized love and obedience in His teachings. He states in John 14: 23, “If anyone loves me, he will keep [obey] my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” According to Blackaby and Blackaby, “to become like Jesus, love and obedience must characterize our lives” and community.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, if His believers do not keep His commands (His Word), they do not love Him. Jesus said, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). This is the line in the sand for obedience: keeping Jesus’ commands (Word) will show that His children love Him (John 14:21, 24).

The Bible displays a record of God admonishing His children to do as He says—for example: refrain from idols; keep His commands; be separate as a holy nation; and be a holy people unto God and He will be their God and they will be His children. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 God said, “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be

¹⁴⁸ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 36-37.

¹⁴⁹ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ the Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 20.

¹⁵⁰ Blackaby and Blackaby, *A God-Centered Church*, 94.

my people.” This had to do with setting believers apart from unbelievers so they would not be unequally yoked. Obedience is keeping God’s commands; He said He would be their God if they live according to His ways, and that takes obedience and self-discipline.

Believers need to be aware of self-discipline or self-works as it will not get one into heaven. James 14:26 states that saving faith and works are inseparable from one another, as one without the other does not work. Hindson and Mitchell say that “James’s emphasis is on vital Christianity characterized by good deeds and a faith that works...faith...accompanied by consistent lifestyle” and they also state that James 2:24 “does not contradict Paul’s teaching on justification by faith alone (Eph 2:8-10).”¹⁵¹

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Community Life

God designed the community—His church, a Body of believers to have a restored love relationship with Him to carry out His Will. Relationships in community has been God’s design from the beginning. Simpson et al., say, “the importance of relation in community is emphasized in the common experience...through the relationship with others” and “relationships represent a crucial component of our existence.”¹⁵² In fact, through community relationships one can know more about God.

Kendell Easley and Christopher Morgan say that Jesus, the “New Covenant and community is here; the Spirit has been poured out on the entire community (Acts 2); all those in community know God in a direct and immediate fashion (Eph 2:18)” and when there is repentance “all are declared forgiven of their sins before God (Rom 8:1).”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Hindson and Mitchel, *Zondervan King James*, 708.

¹⁵² David B. Simpson et al., “The Relationship of Religious Participation,” 362.

¹⁵³ Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan, *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2013), 202.

Darrell Bock also discusses what the new community life represents and says that the community seeks “God’s direction and is dependent upon God because God’s family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction.”¹⁵⁴ The early church had “actions centered on God” that were “believing; praying; worshipping;” and “hearing and obeying.”¹⁵⁵ The community of believers today is still devoted to God’s direction through the Holy Spirit and submit to His Will in belief by faith in God’s Word, prayer, worship, obedience, equipped to serve others, and sent out on God’s mission.

It should be acknowledged that the community of relational soul care is hard to define. It is Christ-centered and focused within a Body of Christ followers who shepherd each other and their neighbors. This community life of believers is a family who continually grows in grace and love. Therefore, there are times for forgiveness, peaceful discussions, and growing in maturity together. Klaus Issler discusses that there are at least three practices that Jesus taught as examples to “help us grow toward greater family unity: forgiving one another; [and] peacemaking in conflict and developing closer friendships as part of building community.”¹⁵⁶ The example of Jesus’ disciples as extensions of His ministry is just as relevant today; as a fulfillment for God’s mission, believers are to continue the ministry of Jesus.

Bill Donahue says relational community life and states that “we did not create community. It is a gift given to us in which we participate and for which Christ prayed and died.”¹⁵⁷ Ruth Barton echoes Donahue’s point: no one created community, as the “community

¹⁵⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

¹⁵⁵ Easley and Morgan, *The Community of Jesus*, 97.

¹⁵⁶ Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 164.

¹⁵⁷ Bill Donahue, *The Irresistible Community: An Invitation to Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 245.

we are seeking already exists in Christ at the cosmic level.”¹⁵⁸ Living in community is about a love relationship with God and others. Donahue states his recipe for community life: the fellowship table of Jesus (join); the towel as serving one another (practice); and the truth of God’s Word (live).¹⁵⁹ He continues to voice that God’s people “come to the table for hope and longing to connect,” as this is where the children of God “belong and begin doing life together in community.”¹⁶⁰ When a love relationship with God and others is all in alignment, community relational soul care begins. Donahue adds that during this process, “we strengthen our circle of community with truth, about God, about ourselves, and about others. We embrace reality with courage and hope...practice a life of truth, individually and as a community.”¹⁶¹

Relationships within a community make the community stronger, and people grow in relational attachments to others. Gordon L. Everett says, “Where community was growing the fastest, “friendship ties were named predominately as the enfolding link to the congregation.” So, once people became spiritual friends, they connected to the congregation. Everett states that “people least likely to become inactive members were those who became part of a small group fellowship before entering into formal membership. They had been assimilated to some degree even before joining.”¹⁶² People usually get closer to one another when they are in small groups. This is one example that will show that community relational soul care bonding is important for the overall health of the body of Christ.

¹⁵⁸ Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together in Christ: Experiencing Transformation in Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 31.

¹⁵⁹ Donahue, *The Irresistible Community*, 245.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Gordon L. Everett, “Relationships: The Missing Link in Evangelistic Follow Up,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142, no. 566 (1985): 154, accessed December 30, 2016, Academic OneFile.

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Service

Ed. Hindson and Daniel Mitchel discuss serving in Romans 1:9: the “word for serve (Greek *latreuó*) has a rich background in sacred and priestly service (see Heb 9:9; 10:2).”¹⁶³ The priesthood served God and the people. The “Lord Jesus is a servant unto God.”¹⁶⁴ Jesus came to serve man and took upon Himself the sins of the world to give eternal life to a dying world. Therefore, believers are to live a life of service to God and man, and His children are called to serve one another as an example of Christ-likeness.

Loving others is the second greatest commandment, and loving others also means serving others. In James 2:14-26, James correlates faith and works. So, if one has faith but knows that a brother or sister is in need and does not help them him or her, is this Christian (faith)? James says no, and continues stating, “faith apart from works is dead” (Jas 2:26).

On the issue of servanthood, Luke discusses the narrative of the wise steward (12:42-44). This is where one is to use their gifts unto God, and if they do there will be rewards. In Luke 12; 44-48, Hindson and Mitchel believe “those who have much to offer in service to the Lord will be called to do more” and held accountable.¹⁶⁵ However, whether a wise steward or a servant to others, there is a prerequisite. First, one must be a servant unto Lord Jesus. Jesus says, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:26).

Essentials for Spiritual Vitality Living in Mission

¹⁶³ Edward E. Hindson and Daniel R. Mitchel, *Zondervan King James New Commentary: New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 413.

¹⁶⁴ Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson, *Exploring Bible Prophecy from Genesis to Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), 340.

¹⁶⁵ Hindson and Mitchel, *Zondervan King James*, 205.

The Great Commission is a living mission, spoken in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24: 46-48, John 20:21 and Acts 1:8. Hirschman said it is Jesus' "last will and testament."¹⁶⁶ The redemptive mission for the Incarnational Jesus started when He was born. God sent an angel to Mary to announce Jesus' birth and the birth of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. Jesus knew His mission as He came for the oppressed and announced it early in His ministry (in the synagogue reciting Isaiah's scroll 61:1-2).

Jesus taught His disciples for over three years and gave them power and authority (Holy Spirit) to carry out His mission to redeem the lost and restore God's people back to Himself. Since then, all believers have the mission to which Jesus alluded in His High Priestly Prayer to the Father in John 17:18: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Jesus was the sent one, on mission from God (*Missio Dei*). Now, all believers are the sent ones to carry out His mission with power of the Holy Spirit.

Part 2: RESTORE

Biblical Manual in 1, 2, 3 John

Part two of this paradigm, RESTORE, is based on the format from the Epistles of John. This process is not a formal counseling session, but it is for a mentor (spiritual leader) and care seeker after counseling to continue for soul care to nurture God's people to spiritual vitality. The mentor is more than just a person to hold someone accountable. He or she is not formally trained in Christian counseling (but can be), but is rather like a person who discipless others. Although mentors are trained in the Bible; they are not a priest, pastor or biblical counselor with many years of schooling. A spiritual leader/mentor is a soul caregiver who is a disciple of Jesus that

¹⁶⁶ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 47.

disciples care seekers. Greg Ogden defines a helper as a disciple who is in an “intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another to grow toward maturity in Christ.”¹⁶⁷ In addition, the mentor should meet with the pastor/leader monthly to be mentored in appropriate guidance for the care seeker.

Meetings should not exceed 90 minutes, and there should be one meeting each month for seven months (this can be adapted). It takes approximately 30 minutes for the care seeker to tell his or her story (first meeting). Next, the mentor presents the RELATE acrostic essentials for living in spiritual vitality: (1) God’s Word (2) love (3) worship (4) prayer (5) [obedience] (6) community (7) service and (8) evangelism.¹⁶⁸ Then there should be 30 minutes of Bible study in the Epistles of John (about one chapter per month; God’s story) and 30 minutes of reflection for alignment and restoration to live Godward in discipleship and experience spiritual vitality (our story). The two-part paradigm is in conjunction with the mentor and community of believers in the same time frame; this means the mentor and care seeker meets monthly for 90 minutes and the fellowship group (mission focused) meets monthly for approximately 120 minutes.

Before the first meeting, the mentor would have everything in order as understanding of where to meet, atmosphere, and confidentially discussed and signed by both parties. It is important that confidentially is discussed for safety and security. Preferably within that same week, the mentor and care seeker will join the fellowship group that will be available for community relational soul care fellowship. The care seeker would be accountable to his or her mentor (same gender). Without the invitation for the Holy Spirit (Advocate), there is no guidance or direction for both people, so all meetings begin and end with prayer as the Holy Spirit allows.

¹⁶⁷ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 9.

For spiritual vitality, the overarching goal is to “RESTORE” believer’s back to God, loving others, and continually developing a God-centered self. Jesus’ words speak to the heart of the matter as He says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6). His truth is His Word, and without knowing His Word there is no way to have a relationship with Him. For Christians, under this umbrella is living in the fullness of the Word (God) of life, walking in God’s Light, and living in God’s Love, as imitators of Christ (Eph 5:1).¹⁶⁹ Part two of this paradigm for restoring God’s people has an acrostic for the word RESTORE that is woven throughout the Epistles of John and application for reflection for seeking spiritual vitality. RESTORE is a process throughout seven months that the care seeker would gain wisdom and develop maturity. The following figure 7 reveals the acrostic for Part Two RESTORE:

RESTORE Acrostic
R elationship/fellowship with God and others (besides mentor and community)
E ngage in retelling care seekers story; collaborative communication
S oul searching solutions; Spirit of truth; Scripture
T ransformation lived out Godward for Spiritual vitality
O thers; reaching outward in love, discipleship, God’s mission, walking in Light
R estoration (plan of action)
E stablish alignment with God; consistent obedience to God and prayer

Fig. 7. RESTORE Acrostic

In part two, restoring care seekers to healthy discipleship begins with initiating a relationship with the mentor (spiritual helper). The mentor or helper walks alongside the care

¹⁶⁹ Ephesians 5:1, “Unless otherwise stated all Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible” (Glassport, PA: Biblehub.com, 2016).

seeker to engage in soul care, as the “Triune God and the Christian helper work together to bring the sojourner to a deep level of union and communion with God.”¹⁷⁰

Next is the understanding of the Christian walk in the study of the Epistles of John for the foundation for God’s Word. The plan of action is focusing on collaborative solutions by adjusting to God’s Word for restoration (RESTORE application). In one approach, is the mentor sets an example by reading Scripture and talking about the meaning. The care seeker also reads God’s Word to develop an inward focus of Jesus’s life and ministry. The care seeker now starts to understand Scripture, but the Holy Spirit will have been working in his or her life to open his or her mind and heart to Jesus. Furthermore, the care seeker can begin to develop his or her journey by living in truth, being a beacon of His light, and walking in His love. This is directed and stimulated toward a love relationship with God and others, communion in prayer, and obedience to God as the Holy Spirit will continually guide this person to spiritual vitality. This paradigm is the second part to spiritual vitality.

There are three essential themes (the three W’s) considered for continued soul care in the Epistles of John: God is Life (Word), God is Light (God’s wisdom/Christians walk with wisdom), and God is Love (worship). This transformational paradigm from the acrostic word RESTORE is woven throughout the study of the three Epistles of John. This foundational study in the Word will help a care seeker grow to spiritual vitality through the lens of God’s love for mankind. The entire Bible shows that God wants to have a love relationship with His children (2 Cor 5:18-19). God’s love is perfect (Psalm 18:30), and He pursues His children in order to connect with them in all areas of psychological, physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual wholeness to commune with their souls.

¹⁷⁰ Clinton, Hawkins, and Carboneau, “Soul Care,” 16.

1 John 1

For a brief introduction, the author of the Epistles of John is usually accepted by scholars as the Apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John (Luke 6:13, 14) and Revelation (Rev 1:1) even though there is “no identity of author.”¹⁷¹ John was a brother to James (Acts 12:2), one of the three “intimate associates” of Jesus’ ministry, and part of the inner circle with Peter and James.¹⁷² The year is most likely before AD 95, when John was likely in his elder years writing from the city of Ephesus.¹⁷³

The theme of 1 John 1:1-4 is God is Life. John shows the purpose for this letter in the first four verses. He also voices his personal relationship as bearing first-hand witness to Jesus. Other important themes are: God is light; fellowship (with others); and fellowship with the Father and Son; and the practical purpose is to have joy in Christ.

On the message of 1 John 1, Ed Hindson and Elmer Towns say, “all true believers...are not only looking ahead in faith toward something future but can already know their destiny with great assurance.”¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, they discuss that John uses the Greek words “*oida* and *ginōskō*” which means “to know,” and they are used “seventy-seven times in thirty-two verses.”¹⁷⁵ John reaffirms “what his audience already knows” in six essentials:

The truth (2:2); (2) that they have a relationship with God (2:3-5, 13, 14); (3) that He hears and grants their prayer requests (5:14-15); (4) that Jesus was righteous, did not sin, came to take away sin, and that when He appears they will be like Him (2:29; 3:2); (5)

¹⁷¹ John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005). 1944.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ed Hindson and Elmer Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 545.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

that sin is not characteristic of someone in fellowship with God (3:9; 5:18); and (6) the final hour is at hand (2:18).¹⁷⁶

There are more essentials for assurance for Christians as “Jesus is the Son of God (5:5) [and] believers have eternal life through Him (5:11)” besides hearing and answering prayers: “they are no longer in bondage to sin but are kept safe by God from the evil one (5:18); they are children of God (5:19); they can know God through His Son, Jesus Christ (5:20);” and “Jesus is “the true God” (5:20).”¹⁷⁷ The first few words of 1 John 1 have the phrase “from the beginning,” which is the heart and “stability of the gospel message. Its contents do not change,” but worldly thinking does change.¹⁷⁸

More connection goes back to Genesis 1:1, “in the beginning,” but Elmer Towns states that “Christ is called ‘the Word’ (Greek *ho logos*) six times in Scripture, and all occurrences appear only in the writings of John (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev 19:13).” In the Genesis connection, Towns discusses that “Genesis begins with the creation of the world, at a point that began time, while John (John 1:1) reaches back beyond time into eternity.”¹⁷⁹

John 1:1 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This verse and others have similarities as 1 John 1; this is one of many reasons why scholars believe John is the author of the Epistles. John 1:2-3 also exhibit similarities: “He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Also, there are similarities between 1 John 1 and John 4, which states, “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.”

¹⁷⁶ Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 545.

¹⁷⁷ Zondervan, *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 2025.

¹⁷⁸ John MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John & Jude* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007) 8.

¹⁷⁹ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 1.

John MacArthur argues that John gives the foundation for Christian life; there are several contrasts throughout the epistle, but MacArthur says John sent the letter to “those who claim to be Christians must absolutely display the characteristics of Christians: sound doctrine, obedience and love.”¹⁸⁰ When one fellowships with God, as stated in 1 John 1:3, “fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,” and he or she will partake or commune in the Lord’s Supper. J. R. McRay reveals that this “constitutes a fellowship or participation in the blood and Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16).”¹⁸¹ He also says this maybe one meaning “of the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1), one of the ways we become partakers (*koinonia*) of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), and of the glory that is to be revealed (1 Pet 5:1).”¹⁸²

The purpose of this letter is to restore people back to the Father and bring them into a love relationship with Him. Robert Yarbough says, “to promote fellowship...have fellowship with us...not just any fellowship,” but “by those who know God the Father in His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).¹⁸³ He also states that “fellowship (*koinonia*)” promotes a meaning of “sharing the experience of a common yet a transcendent bond and especially a bond of trust in the crucified Christ... whether as a state of relationships between human(s) and God or...between or among humans.”¹⁸⁴ Therefore, John is writing to his readers to “promote unity and harmony” that he calls the “communion of saints, both with God and one another.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1947.

¹⁸¹ J. R. McRay, “Fellowship,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 445.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Robert W. Yarbrough, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament: 1-3 John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 41-42.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Larry Crabb also discusses unity. Jesus wants unity among His followers. John 17: 23 states, “I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” Crabb suggests that Jesus is saying, “how we get along with one another is the most persuasive evidence the Holy Spirit has to work with as He draws people to Jesus.”¹⁸⁶

The Apostle John adds another reason for this letter: “that the readers joy may be increased and be sustained.”¹⁸⁷ He wanted his believers to experience the “full blessings of the gospel” so that a “community of faith, can be transformed by Christ.”¹⁸⁸ MacArthur also believes that when there is true fellowship, “fellowship in eternal life produces joy.”¹⁸⁹

The next section is based on Scripture within Scripture. Important Scripture words will be expanded upon (e.g. table 1.3) for study in RESTORE. The mentor and care seeker will study key words in 1 John 1:1-4: heard, seen, looked, touched, Word of life, fellowship, and joy. The care seeker will have a printed Bible and a commentary to compare Scripture. For home study, the care seeker will read through the Psalms for laments so he or she can go to God with his or her voice and heart.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

1 John 1:1-4, “1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life. 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us. 3 What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.”

¹⁸⁶ Crabb, *Real Church*, 122.

¹⁸⁷ Yarbrough, *Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ MacArthur, *1, 2, 3 John & Jude*, 9.

Table 1.3 Scripture Study

John 1:1	“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
John 1:14	“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
Revelation 19: 11-13	“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it <i>is</i> called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes <i>are</i> a flame of fire, and on His head, <i>are</i> many diadems; and He has a name written <i>on Him</i> which no one knows except Himself. <i>He is</i> clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”
John 14:6	“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”
John 11:25	“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.’”

In this Scripture 1 John 5-10, there are expanded study words for further wisdom. The Scripture study words for this passage consists of God is light; light; fellowship with Him; walk in the light; in Him there is no darkness; and fellowship with one another. Also, there is additional Scripture study in table 1.4 for the following passage to address Scripture within Scripture for better understanding:

1 John 1:5-10, “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins; He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

Table 1. 4 Scripture Study

1 John 1:7	“but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
1 John 2:9	“The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.”
Ephesians 5:8	“for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.”
John 8:12	“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’”
Psalms 89:15	“How blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! O LORD, they walk in the light of Your countenance.”
Psalms 36:9	“For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light, we see light.”

RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

Living for truth application includes the words for expanded study: Word is truth; Christian walk; wisdom; and worship. There are three main verses that are essential for wisdom in the Christian walk towards spiritual vitality, which is based on this paradigm in the Epistles of John. First, God is Life (His Word is truth, eternal life), “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:12). Second, God is Light (Christian way, walk, and wisdom, as beacons of light showing purity and goodness), “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there

is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Third, God is Love (worship Him with a pure heart), “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16).

The Scripture words—heard, seen, looked, and touched—are the consensus of John being a first-hand witness to the Incarnational Jesus Christ who walked this earth. He is the Word of Life that gives life to His believers on this earth and eternal life to come. The Word of Life is the food for the soul that sustains believers for complete joy. For soul care, it could also be seen as how a Christian should seek after spiritual vitality in this life for the crown in eternal life.

The word “heard” could mean hearing God’s Word in listening to one another in love, guidance, healing, encouragement, and nurturing. Peterson believes that when one develops a skill to “creative listening,” it is “listening into love,” as it will be a “journey into a higher quality of life.”¹⁹⁰ Jesus had the skill of listening to people. Unless someone listens with his or her heart of love like Jesus, listening alone will “not move us toward more satisfying relationships where we develop trust, intimacy, and personal sharing.”¹⁹¹

John Koessler makes a point about hearing for spiritual maturity: “the ear is important. Wisdom is gained by turning one’s ear to it (Prov 2:2).”¹⁹² He also says that the “wise will apply the ‘heart to instruction and [their] ears to words of knowledge (Proverbs 21:13; 23:12).”¹⁹³ Scripture states believers are to listen to “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence

¹⁹⁰ James C. Peterson, *Why Don't We Listen Better?: Communicating & Connecting in Relationships* (Portland, OR: Peterson's Publications, 2015), 126, Kindle.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 649.

¹⁹² John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 101-102.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

and if anything, worthy of praise, dwell on these things” (Phil 4:8). These are positive ways of hearing or listening to wisdom. The mother of Jesus (Luke 1:37-38) is an example of “hearing and responding to God,” as many others in the Bible heard God by having an “open heart.”¹⁹⁴

But what are some improper ways of listening? Klaus Issler discusses moving past hindrances to hear God’s truth. He notes the parable of the four soils (Matt 13:3-23) as an example of (first three) hindrances to overcome and have more fruit-filled Christian living. He expresses that the “parable is about hearing that leads to productive living, and adapting the parable [for the disciples of the kingdom] will mean enabling people to move past merely hearing words-even with joy-to hearing that captures the whole person.”¹⁹⁵ Issler notes that when Jesus tells the parable, He “indicates that the four persons represented by the soils all hear the truth. The difference lies in how they hear, the kind of heart each soil represents.”¹⁹⁶

The words “seen and looked” are visual words; believers should be looking at things that are holy unto the Lord because they are set apart, to live holy lives (Lev 20:26). Believers could be lead astray from God if they watch immoral things on television, Internet, or movies, Psalm 119:59 states, “I considered my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies.” John Barnett makes a statement and states that to “examine our life and say, ‘Lord, there are a lot of things I could do in life, a lot of ways I could live,’” but God gives man a choice to choose His way of life.¹⁹⁷ Surely, to live a godly life, a believer must choose His ways: “But after thinking about my ways, I have turned my feet to Your testimonies. I want Your way, not mine.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 28.

¹⁹⁵ Issler, “Five Key Barriers,” 138.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹⁹⁷ John Samuel Barnett, *Discipline Yourself for Godliness: Seven Disciplines for Investing Your Life with God* (Tulsa, OK: BFM Books, 2014), 848, Kindle.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

The word “touching” could be used as a self-control issue; not to touch something that does not belong to another person, even if it is the property of a family member. It could mean not to covet your neighbor’s possessions (Acts 20:33; Exod 20:17). These words are used negatively; however, each one can be used positively, like in the context of Christian hugs. How many ways can the word “touching” be used to live in Christian maturity?

The theme in 1 John 5-10 is that God is Light; therefore, believers must walk in the Light of God. Moreover, the whole First Epistle of John is written to the children to walk in the light—to be the light in dark world, where sin lurks to devour its prey. This means to have good behavior, like Jesus’ loving character towards others. If someone says he or she loves his or her brother but fails to meet his needs (e.g. food or shelter), he or she is not loving.

The Apostle John also contrasts light and darkness. Hindson and Towns say, “God is light” and He has “no darkness in Him,” and that if someone “claims to have fellowship with God but continues to walk in darkness (sin) is deceiving himself and others.”¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, when a believer walks “in the light (righteousness) of Jesus are forgiven, cleansed from their sins, and experience true fellowship (1 John 1:6-10).”²⁰⁰

1 John 2

The theme in 1 John 2:1 is Jesus Christ is our Advocate, Mediator, a Helper in time need. More themes are to keep God’s commandments; do not love the world; false teachers; contrasts for love and hate for believers; promise of God is eternal life; and God’s children are to abide in

¹⁹⁹ Hindson and Towns, *Illustrated Bible Survey*, 545.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Him. The key words for the Scripture passage includes: little children; young men; and fathers.

Furthermore, in the following table 1.5 includes advanced Bible study for 1 John 2:1-14.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

1 John 2:1, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” 1 John 2:12-14, “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

Table 1. 5 Scripture Study

1 Timothy 2:5	“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”
Hebrew 8:6	“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.”
Hebrews 9:15	“For this reason, He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”
Hebrews 9:24	“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Hebrews 12:24	“and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”
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RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

Bruce Demarest expands the stages of the spiritual journey with the little “children, young people, and fathers” from 1 John 2, as he involves “three ways” in marking spiritual growth in the journey paradigm for “purgation, illumination, and union.”²⁰¹ First, he uses the “purgative way” as the “purification of sins, the practice of spiritual disciplines (including prayer) and loosing attachment to material things.”²⁰² A Christian can stay in this stage for a long time and not advance to the second stage. It is important to recognize this stage because prayers are sporadic and lukewarm, even though God’s children have surrendered their lives to Jesus.

Secondly, Demarest uses the “illuminative way... surrendering to the Spirit’s light, deepening love for God and others and developing virtues such as humility, self-control, patience and generosity.”²⁰³ This stage is an intimate relationship with God and others, but this is where most people stay. When God has His young people’s attention and the path is illuminated, the “soul becomes gathered in loving surrender such as profound communion with Christ occurs. The soul is transformed.”²⁰⁴ However, there is so much more to developing spiritual vitality. The perfect union with Christ and the mature Christian is represented as the fathers (highest union with Triune God) in 1 John 2.

²⁰¹ Demarest, “Reflections on Developmental Spirituality,” 154.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 157.

The third way is called the “unitive way...[which] represents the highest state of integration and spiritual maturity possible in this life,” and this is based on the “union taught by Jesus in John 14:20.²⁰⁵ This unity is spoken “in that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” According to Demarest, this means “spiritual union is facilitated by contemplation, purity of life and the exercise of love.”²⁰⁶ All stages, even in the third stage, people sin because perfection can only be reached in heaven. In this stage, the marks of a mature Christian are:

The journeyer is raised with Christ and experiences the fire of divine love in which three persons of the Trinity are communicated to the soul. The flame of love is the Spirit of the Bridegroom who is the Holy Spirit...every time it flares up, bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it with divine love. The Christian now experiences an unbroken sense of God’s presence, deep peace among trials, and a heart transformed in faith, hope and charity. In this final stage, the soul has entered into ‘spiritual marriage,’ offering a foretaste of heavenly glory...The third stage involves being securely reoriented (relocated) involving spiritual renewal, deepened relationship with God and joy supplanting despair...finally, the Spirit empowers the Christian for a life of selfless love.²⁰⁷

This stage is where a child of God can have peace in knowing Jesus will be with him or her in any trial. Also, he or she will experience joy and learn to lean on Jesus in “whatever situation ... [he or she is] to be content” (Phil 4:11). Furthermore, one will not worry or be anxious over what the future will hold (Matt 6:34; Phil 4:6), even if things do not go according to plans. The imitators of Christ know God is in control and “causes all things to work together for good” (Rom 8:28). He gives hope to the weary, strength to the weak, and light to a dark world. One will know God’s voice, even in a crisis.

Don Willet has another view of eight stages of maturity. He notes that 1 John 2:12-14 contains three milestones as stated little children (first stage), for “childhood, the birth of

²⁰⁵ Demarest, “Reflections on Developmental Spirituality,” 154.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 159-160.

faith...[as] experiencing grace and forgiveness; embracing God the Father; and growing up together.”²⁰⁸ The second stage is young men (1 John 2:13). Young men are in the middle age where they seem to need more guidance, as sin is always at the door. This is because they have not experienced the long journey of a seasoned and experienced father. Don Willett goes on to explain the last stage in 1 John 2:14, which is “ownership of faith” as “owning faith; linking truth and life; [and] defeating the enemies of spiritual growth.”²⁰⁹ Finally, fathers in 1 John 2:13-14 are “embowing faith” in “empowering others; [and] seasoned with time and experience.”²¹⁰

1 John 3

The main themes of 1 John 3 are the children of God and loving one another. The key words for 1 John 3:1: “sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:26). Furthermore, in table 1.6 and table 1.7 reveals the following Scripture study.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

1 John 3:1, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are.”

Table 1. 6. Scripture Study

John 1:12	“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”
Matthew 5:9	“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

²⁰⁸ Don Willett, “A Biblical Model of Stages of Biblical Development: The Journey According to John,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 3, no. 1 (2010): 94, accessed December 1, 2016, Academic OneFile.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 94-95.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 95

Romans 8:14	“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”
2 Corinthians 6:18	“‘And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty.”
Galatians 3:26	“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

1 John 3:11, “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” Also, 1 John 3:23 states, “This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.”

Table 1.7 Scripture Study

John 13:34	“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”
John 15:12	“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”
Galatians 5:13	“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only <i>do not turn</i> your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
Philippians 2:1-2	Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”
1 Peter 4:8	“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

Henry Blackaby et al. discuss the three tests of faith in 1 John 3. This chapter talks about God's love, the children of God, and loving one another. The Blackaby's discuss 1, 2, and 3 John with the three tests of faith: "as you walk with the Lord, learn from Him, and see His activity, be sure to share the blessing. Others need to hear and know the goodness of God as well."²¹¹

The Blackabys in another study commentary, examine the book of 1 John 3. John talks about the correlation between loving one another and loving God: "if we do not love others, we really don't love God...the only way we can begin to love God as God loved is to allow God's love to flow into us and through us," and by this, everyone will know that God is love and His disciples.²¹² God showed His children how to love so that they would let this love flow out to others.

1 John 3:24 states, "The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." The theme is about abiding in His love. According to Blackaby et al. to abide means the "Greek word (*menó*) translated 'abide' means to remain or stay in one place...to abide in God is to live in His presence and to take on His characteristics."²¹³ Without the Holy Spirit's presence, there would be no means of communication with the Father God.

1 John 4

The main themes of 1 John 4 are God is love and abiding in His love. 1 John 4:7-21 talks about abiding in love. *The Oxford Commentary* shows abiding in God's love as "The thought returns to the life of the Community, interlacing assurance with exhortation, centered on the

²¹¹ Henry T. Blackaby et al., *NKJV, The Blackaby Study Bible: Personal Encounters with God Through His Word* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006), 1494.

²¹² Henry Blackaby et al., *1, 2, 3 John and Jude* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 27.

²¹³ Henry Blackaby et al., *NKJV, The Blackaby Study Bible*, 1498.

theme of love, which moves inseparably both between God and believers and amongst believers themselves.”²¹⁴

From the beginning, God planned to restore the broken relationships with mankind, but He wants His children’s love, as “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matt 22:37; Deut 6:5), “because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Then, believers are to live their lives Godward as loving, forgiving one another, teaching, admonishing, encouraging, and praising God individually and corporately (Matt 22:38; Col 1:28; 3:16).

The following contains key words for the themes in 1 John 4: “love of God; God is love; father who has loved us; God of love; and because He first loved us.” Furthermore, table 1. 8 presents advanced Scripture study.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

1 John 4:8, “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Also, 1 John 4:9, “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.” It states in 1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Table 1. 8 Scripture Study

1 John 4:16	“We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”
1 John 4:18	“We love, because He first loved us.”

²¹⁴ John Barton and John Muddiman, ed., *The Oxford Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2007), 1279.

2 Corinthians 13:11	“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”
Ephesians 2:4-5	“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17	“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”
Titus 3:4-5	“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

God is love; therefore, humans need to have a love relationship with Him. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Blackaby and Blackaby say that the Christian walk is aimed at a love relationship with God, to know and “experience His working in us and through us;” all for the glory of God.²¹⁵ How does one have a love relationship with God? The place to begin is in the Scriptures.

The Bible is the fountain to know God’s Word and daily drinking with God will quench one’s thirst. Once the Holy Spirit works in the believer, a relationship can be built. Without communication with prayer, there can be no relationship. It is a daily guide for living the

²¹⁵ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 36.

Christian life. When a person opens the Bible, the or she comes “face-to-face with the author-God! The Holy Spirit is present to open the mind and heart of the child of God to an immediate word from God for that person’s life (John 14:16-17; John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16).”²¹⁶

The following figure 8 examines how Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins “describe characteristics of love (1 Cor 13:4-8)” from the Bible:²¹⁷

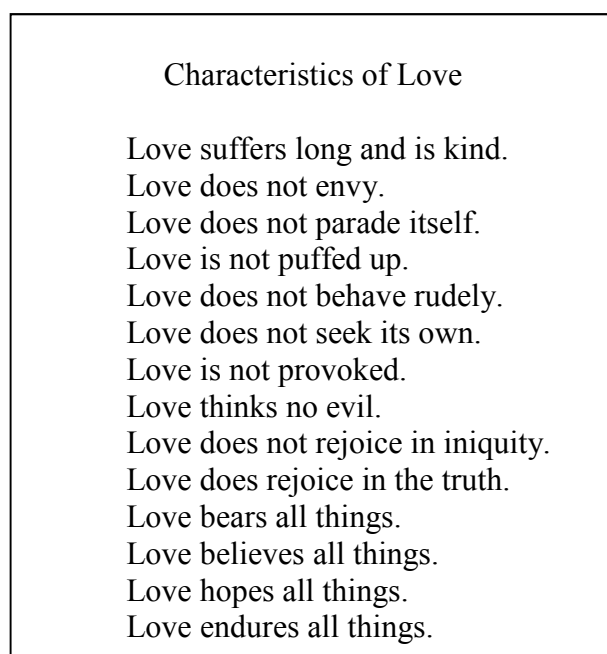


Fig. 8. Characteristics of Love

Clinton and Hawkins say, “Love is so completely oriented to another-in thought, feeling, behavior-that their best interest and desires become as important, if not more so than yours.”²¹⁸

As Romans 12:9-13 states, “Let love be without hypocrisy... Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” Christians are to be devoted to one another because they are to love and serve

²¹⁶ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 17.

²¹⁷ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *Biblical Counseling: A Quick Reference Guide to* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 156.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

each other, and always looking out for one another's best interests. Loving is a lifetime of service for image-bearers of Christ; the children of God follow His pattern. Clinton and Hawkins continue to use "loves other remarkable qualities" from Romans 12:11-21:²¹⁹

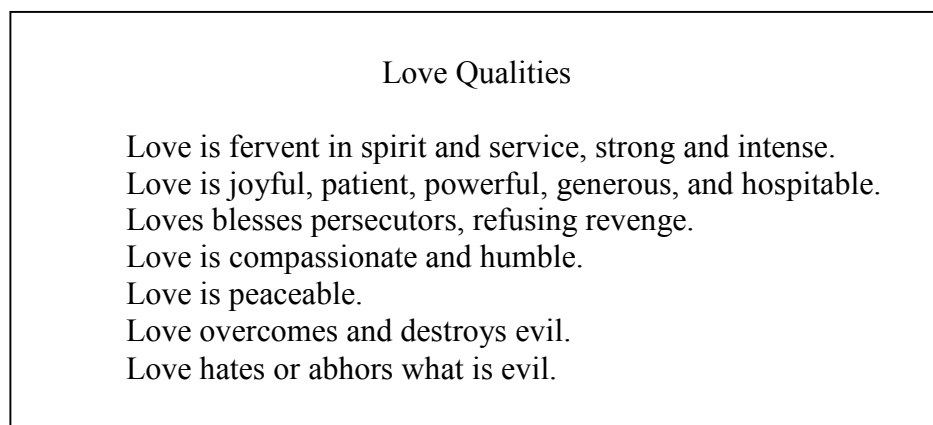


Fig. 9. Love Qualities

David Benner also remarks that love is "the glue for connection. Love is the source of the deepest wellsprings of human vitality. Love is the only hope of overcoming our isolation. Love invites surrender and offers the intimacy and deep connection for which we long."²²⁰ He also notes that love is cemented to the One who created it. He continues to emphasize that love "reconnects us to life," but not just any life; it is a life with the life giver.²²¹

1 John 5

There are several themes for 1 John 5, and the first being prayer according to God's Will. Other themes are overcoming the world, "victory in faith, witnesses to the Son" and "exhortation to sinlessness," observe His commandments, and ask God anything according to His Will.²²²

²¹⁹ Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *Biblical Counseling*, 157.

²²⁰ David G. Benner, *Surrender to Love* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 16.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²²² Barton and Muddiman, ed., *The Oxford Commentary*, 1279-1280.

Table 1.9 presents an overview of Scripture study for 1 John 5. According to Blackaby et al., 1 John 5:4 suggests that “the victorious Christian life is the Holy Spirit’s response to our faith...the strength to overcome is in direct proportion to our faith.”²²³

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

1 John 5:14, “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” Also, 1 John 5:15 states, “And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”

Table 1. 9. Scripture Study

1 John 5:1	“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the <i>child</i> born of Him.”
1 John 5: 2	“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.”
1 John 5:3	“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”
1 John 5:4	“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”
1 John 5:15	“And if we know that He hears us <i>in</i> whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”
Matthew 7:7	"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

²²³ Blackaby et al., *NKJV, The Blackaby Study Bible*, 1499.

1 John 5:21	“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”
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RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

There is confidence in prayer when a believer asks God “anything according to His Will” (1 John 5:14). This is the benefit of prayer when the believer keeps His commandments.

Blackaby et al. suggests that “prayer is a response to His abiding presence, and it aligns us with His purposes.”²²⁴ 1 John 3:22 states, “and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” God wants His children to ask for anything, but Christians sometimes do not read the next few words that says, “according to His will.” If what is according to God’s Will, everything will work out according to His plan because God is in control (Rom 8:28). If a believer asks according to God’s Will, they must be patient that (maybe) it will come to pass, if God sees fit. This is where faith leaves it all in God’s hands. The benefit of prayer and faith is that God is in control.

Henry Blackaby and Norman Blackaby remark that “prayer is the means for us to know the will of God, so that knowing, we can obey Him, and bring glory to Him, before a watching world.”²²⁵ Looking at the reverse, if a believer does not have a prayer life, he or she will not neither know God’s Will, nor be in obedience to Him; therefore, there will be no love relationship, no spiritual vitality, and no glory to God.

In reference to John 5:16-17, Thomas Nelson says, “John is encouraging us to help fellow believers who are straying; we can be the tools God uses to restore an erring brother or sister to

²²⁴ Henry Blackaby et al., *NKJV, The Blackaby Study Bible*, 1500.

²²⁵ Henry Blackaby and Norman Blackaby, *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus: The Power of His Presence and Example* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006), 139.

the true fellowship.”²²⁶ This is one reason why God created community. Soul caregivers are spiritual friends who walk alongside believers to help when they need love and guidance to get through trials. The disciples had Jesus, but when He went to the Father, the disciples had each other and the Holy Spirit: Triune God and community.

To prevent straying, a believer must be obedient to God. Everyone will sin, but the Holy Spirit is always working on a believer’s behalf to bring him or her to God’s ways of thinking. Ron Habermas sets out a plan for personal reconciliation back to the Father. His compare-and-contrast, four-way model for spiritual maturity, is based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-6:1: “communion points to the message of reconciliation; community emphasizes messengers for reconciliation; character cites a metamorphosis through reconciliation; [and] calling acknowledges the ministry of reconciliation.”²²⁷

2 John

Apostle John is the author, an elder writing to an “elect (chosen) lady and her children” (2 John 1). He sends a greeting of Christian love in the Spirit of Truth in the Lord Jesus Christ. He writes to tell them to walk in the truth, according to the commandments of the Lord. This truth was from the beginning. Table 1.10 reveals common key words as walking in truth, walk according to the commandments, and love one another for Scripture study.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

2 John 1:1, “The elder to the chosen [elect] lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth.” Also, 2 John 1:6, “And this is love, that

²²⁶ Thomas Nelson, *Know the Word Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), loc., 124766, Kindle.

²²⁷ Ron Habermas, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, 44.

we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.”

Table 1.10 Scripture Study

2 John 1:2	“for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever.”
2 John 1:3	“Grace, mercy <i>and</i> peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”
2 John 1:4	“I was very glad to find <i>some</i> of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment <i>to do</i> from the Father.”
2 John 1:5	“Now I ask you, lady, not as though <i>I were</i> writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.”

RESTORE: Living in Truth Application

John describes the elect (chosen) lady as a woman that he loves in truth. Kenneth S. Wuest talks about the elect lady, as the “word ‘lady’ is *kuria*, is the feminine form of *kurios*, which means ‘lord,’ master...’Elect’ is *eklektos*, ‘one picked out, chosen.’”²²⁸ It states in the greeting, “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth.”²²⁹ John makes it clear that he loves this lady in truth—God’s truth—in Christian love. He uses the word “*agapō* not *phileō*,” which is intimate, but his love is that in

²²⁸ Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies: From the Greek New Testament Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 199-200.

²²⁹ 2 John 1, “English Standard Version.”

Jesus Christ is the truth [John 1:17; 4:23, 24; 5:33; 14:6; 17:17, 19; 18:37; 1 Cor 13:6; 2 Cor 11:10; Gal 2:5; Eph 4:21; Phil 1:18; 1 John 5:6; 2 John 1:1-4; 3 John 1:1. 3, 4, 8].²³⁰

Wuest repeats how John loved this elect (chosen) lady in truth, a “well-known woman of position in the church [that] was circumscribed by the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.”²³¹ This spiritual friendship was a community relationship that had to do with the “Word of God that he loved her. His love for her had to do with Christian [soul care] relationships in the church life and work.”²³² This is the same love that Jesus had for His disciples in the community circle of faith. It is both genders to have fellowship, Christian love for one another. It is the connection with God (His Spirit of Truth) that He gave to His believers; this is different than a *phileó* love for a relationship with a spouse.

2 John 6 states, “And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.” This love is divine love to love one another as told in 2 John 6. Wuest’s translation is that “we should order [plan] our behavior dominated by His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you heard from the beginning, that in its sphere we should be ordering our behavior.”²³³ When believers order their behavior, they will walk in the light, according to God’s Will. The book of John is about ordering divine Christian love for one another, which is in the Spirit of Truth.

3 John

Apostle John is the author as mentioned back in 1 John introduction. John sends a letter to Gaius, joyfully acknowledging Gaius walking in the truth. Judith Lieu states in her

²³⁰ Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies*, 200.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 204.

commentary, “The source of knowledge of Gaius’s good standing is more explicit than in 2 John: he has heard direct testimony of it.”²³⁴ The testimony of Gaius’s faithfulness was acknowledged in a public place, in community by the brethren which John acknowledged this fact (3 John 6). John makes a point that the brethren need to support him to do the work of ministry in 3 John 8: “Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.” The main key words are walking in truth that is told in table 1.11 for Scripture study.

Key Words in Text for Spiritual Vitality

3 John 1, “The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth;” 3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth;” 3 John 8, “Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

Table 1.11 Scripture Study

3 John 2	“Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”
3 John 3	“For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, <i>that is</i> , how you are walking in truth.”
3 John 5	“Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially <i>when they are</i> strangers.”
3 John 6	“and they have testified to your love before the church.”
3 John 11	“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.”

²³⁴ Judith Lieu, *I, II, III John: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 269.

RESTORE: Living in Truth Application.

This book is about walking in truth according to the commandments of God. From the beginning, God wanted His children's love and obedience. They were to abide in His Word (truth) for a love relationship. This researcher uses what she calls a Genesis Three Question Model for Christian Vitality for believers. There are three main questions for Christians to ask themselves about how to walk in truth and live holy lives. In the beginning, Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God and they "walked with God in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8). Then, they had sinned, so God called out to them.

The Genesis questions are: God asked, (1) "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9); (2) "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen 3:11); and (3) "What is this that you have done?" (Gen 3:13).²³⁵ From this model, this researcher adapted this conversation from God, as the answers could be a paradigm how to work out one's salvation to spiritual vitality.

The first question (1) is "Where are you?" A person could examine his or her life as where they are in their spiritual journey. Are they distressed, stressed, living in sin, not following God's ways, and/or not doing what one is supposed to do, for God, self, family or others? The list goes on. The second question (2) is "Who told you that you were naked?" Who are the people the believers are listening to? As sheep, do His children know their master's voice? Are they listening to God's Word? Adam and Eve did not; they sinned and listened to the evil one that drew them away from God. Are there conflicts within themselves because they do not have a love relationship with God? Who and what are they listening to because they do not think they measure up? Finally, the last question (3) is "What is this that you have done?" Adam and Eve did wrong and sinned. Believers are to recognize what they are doing in their lives as choices and

²³⁵ David Mikkelsen, "Marriage Discussion," Lecture, (Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA., 2016).

decisions that will impact them and others. Do not listen to the voices of false teachers, and be accountable to God for his or her actions. Recognize how one got to the point he or she is at and set out for living a life to spiritual vitality. This three-step process will eventually have a spiritual vitality model by the researcher for further study.

William R. Yount also expresses that “all believers need to walk in truth because the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6) ...[it] is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we comprehend God’s truth.”²³⁶ Regarding John 16:13, he states, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. God the Father is truth (Deut 32:4) and the Son is truth (John 14:6). Therefore, the Word of God is also truth (John 17:17)” and as the “Spirit of truth (John 14:17), the Holy Spirit guides believers to discover and understand truth.”²³⁷

John wrote to the community of believers of Gaius’s faithfulness of truth, the gospel of truth. All believers need to walk according to the Spirit of Truth. John believed Gaius should be supported by the community for the ministry. John mentored the community and he mentored Gaius. It appears that they have mutual love and respect, which are foundations for relationships.

Mentorship and community are living life together for the glory of God as figure 10 states.²³⁸ For spiritual health, it is easy to see how God designed life together in community relational soul care for fellowship, for believers individually, and corporately in community. This Bible study closes with a quote from Kenneth Boa: “Corporate spirituality focuses on dynamics of life together in the Spirit as an essential source of spiritual health. Spiritual formation involves

²³⁶ Octavio Esqueda, “The Holy Spirit as Teacher,” in *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, ed. William R. Yount (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 78.

²³⁷ Ibid., 77.

²³⁸ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 419.

both personal and corporate dimensions, and the Scriptures provide strong foundations for community;” therefore, “ministry should flow out of both solitude and community.”²³⁹

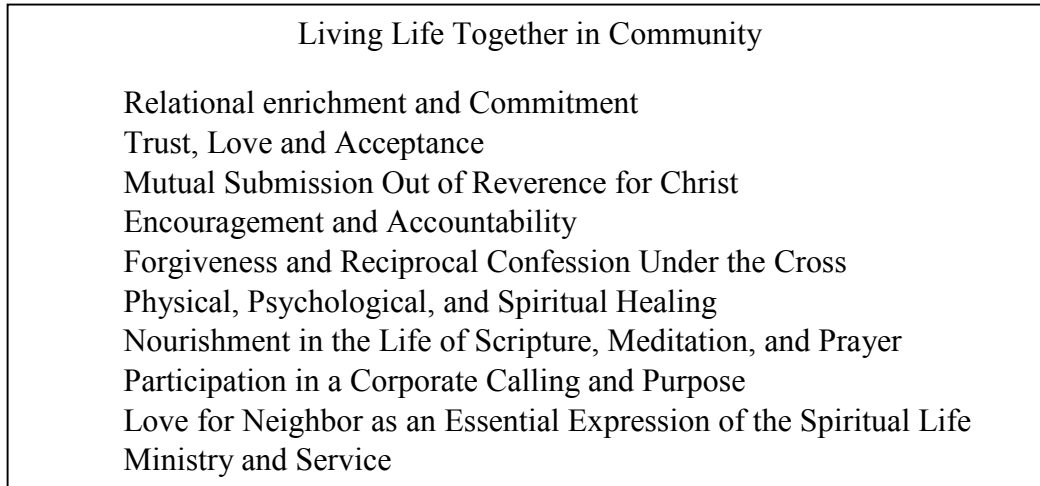


Fig. 10. Living Life Together in Community

²³⁹ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 415.

Chapter 3

Research Overview

The following research information includes the approach to the research, the rationale for the identity of the participants, and why this type of research was chosen. It produces the instrument used in community relational soul care, a twenty-question Likert scale questionnaire, the interpretation from the results of the data that was collected for each group, and the analyzed results for both the men and women's groups.

Research Method, Instrument Used, and Participants

This thesis project is “action research, in its most effective forms, is phenomenological (focusing on people's actual lived experience/reality), interpretive (focusing on their interpretation of acts and activities), and hermeneutic (incorporating the meaning people make of events in their lives).”¹

This phenomenological approach will formulate a pattern from the experience of people who are investigated and the results interpreted, so the research data will obtain a clearer understanding in finding a solution(s) to the study that was conducted.

The research method was focused on two sets of participants who are in community fellowship groups: men's group and women's group. The instrument used was a twenty-question Likert scale questionnaire. The following section includes the reflection on the differences between the women's group and men's group.

The rationale for the identity of the participants is that these fellowship groups conjoin relational dimensions in cultivating God's work in community while seeking time together bonding and shepherding each other through the trials of life as image-bearing disciples. The

¹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 56.

participants were chosen because they were in a relational paradigm within a community. The focus, then, is to ascertain whether community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality using the questionnaire for interpretation. Since there is a need for an extension for soul care after counseling, the question remains: will soul caregivers and spiritual leaders help restore God's people in community for the lifelong journey to spiritual vitality?

Part 1: Relational Soul Care Questions

Research Questions Analysis: One to Twenty

There are twenty participants to answer twenty questions. The first question consists of one to five numbers for participants to circle their highest priorities. The rest of the questions have a scale of importance from one to five. In each box is a cumulative pie graph for each question that explains the ten participants' information.

In this chapter, there are illustrations that include a set of figures for each question. Figures 11 and 12 reveal the data for the first question. Question one for the women's group shows that one person chose health (10%), one person (10%) chose family, while the last eight women (80%) chose God as highest priority. Two women indicated that their health and their family came before God. The men scored 100% in the God category, which means all ten men circled God as the highest priority. God declared His covenant and gave the "Ten Commandments" to follow.² The first commandment is to love God (Deut 6:5); therefore, mankind is to place God above everything and everyone.

Question One

Circle the highest priority in your life right now.

1. Career

² Deuteronomy 4:13, "Unless otherwise stated all Scripture is from the English Standard Version" (Glassport, PA: Biblehub.com, 2016).

2. Education
3. Health
4. Family
5. God

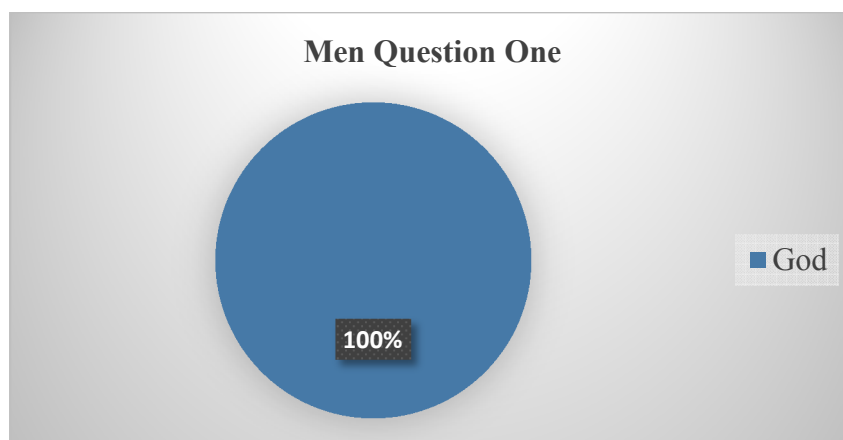


Fig. 11. Men Question One

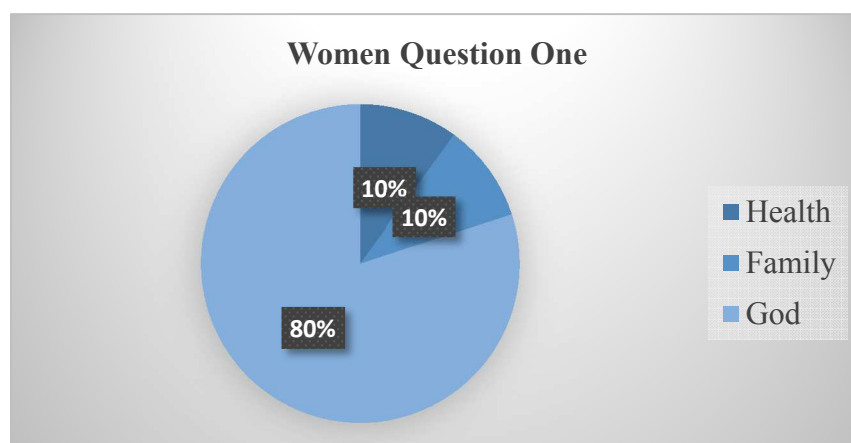


Fig. 12. Women Question One

Question Two

In your women's/men's group (circle gender), whether designed for fellowship, evangelism and/or organizational duties, how important as image bearers of the Triune God, who rely on the Holy Spirit, is the aim to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another?

Not important

Somewhat Important

Most Important

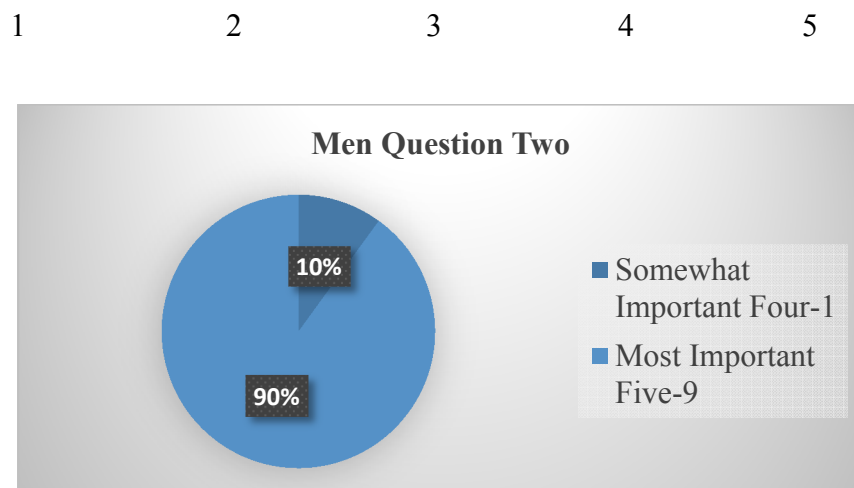


Fig. 13. Men Question Two

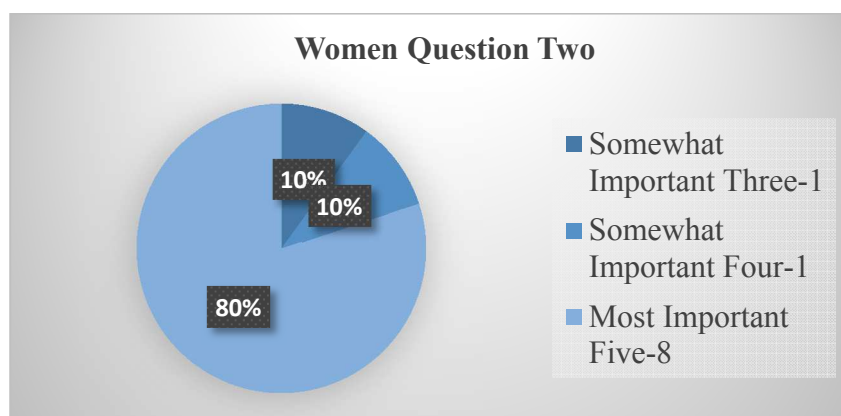


Fig. 14. Women Question Two

Figures 13 and 14 show little difference between the men and women. For the men, 90% decided it was Most Important as image-bearers of the Triune God, who rely on the Holy Spirit, to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another. Only 10% (one man) chose Somewhat Important, on a scale of four in importance.

For the women, two people felt that it was only Somewhat Important. One woman marked a scale of three for number of importance, and one woman marked on a scale of four of

importance; however, 80% decided it was Most Important to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another.

Question Three

Is shepherding each other important for serving in community relational soul care (needs for one another)?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

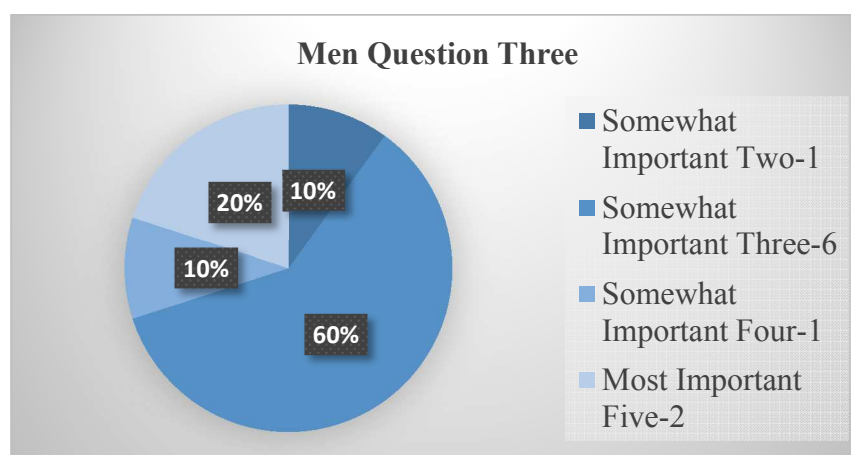


Fig. 15. Men Question Three

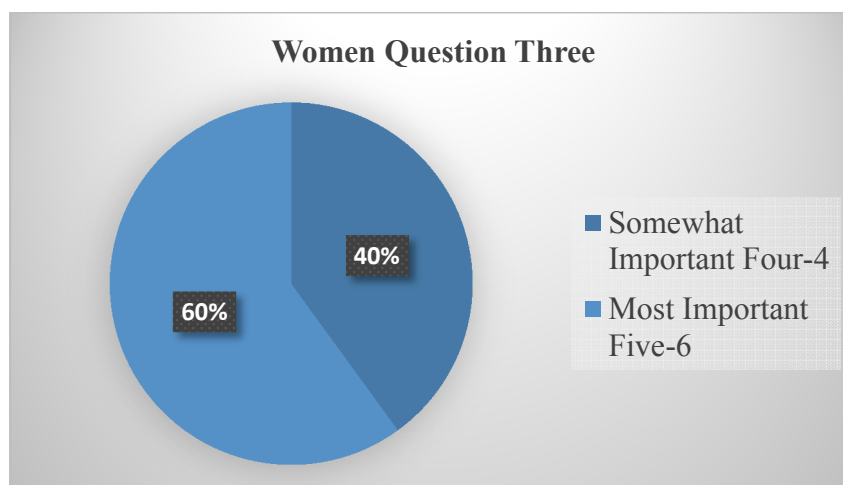


Fig. 16. Women Question Three

This question had stronger reactions for women than men. Women (figure 16) felt it was important as four women (40%) chose number four importance, and six women (60%) chose number five that it was Most Important. The men's answers (figure 15) were very low as 60% chose number three in importance for shepherding each other. One man (10%) chose number two and another man (10%) felt it was only Somewhat Importance and circled number four. However, only 20% (2 men) decided that it should be on a scale of five as Most Important.

Regardless, God commanded that His children should "love one another," as told in Scripture (John 13:35; John 15:12, 17; 2 John 1:5; Eph 4:2; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 2:17). One cannot love one another if God's children ignore each other's needs. The Apostle James states that if people know others are in need and do not help them, they do not love them. God commanded His children to love one another, so as Christians' loving others means not ignoring or shepherding one another in their time of need.

Question Four

How important is doing God's work for the kingdom; to build up, encourage one another, all for strengthening the body of Christ for God's mission?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

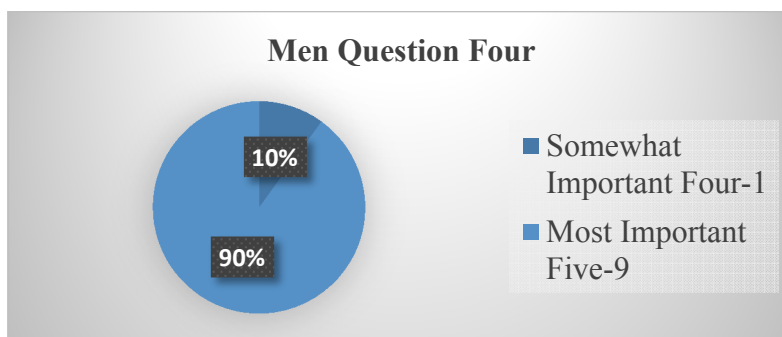
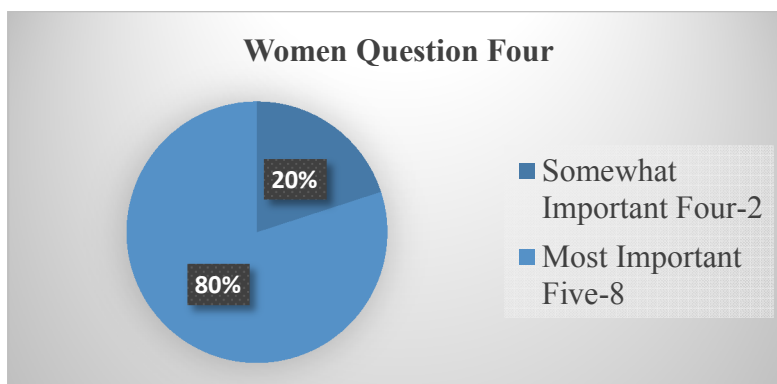


Fig. 17. Men Question Four**Fig. 18. Women Question Four**

Question number four is almost identical for both genders (figures 17 and 18). Only three people decided that number four was not Most Important. This shows how important God’s work is for the kingdom to build up each other (1 Cor 14:26; Rom 15:2), and encourage one another (Rom 15:5), all for strengthening the Body of Christ for God’s mission.

As told in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, God’s children are to “admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” The “focus” is on God’s kingdom, as told in the Lord’s prayer: “For thine is the kingdom” (Matt 6).³ Therefore, Jesus said to Peter to “strengthen your brothers,” when He discussed the kingdom as told in Luke 22:29-32.

Question Five

How important is soul care (needs) for others, especially widows, orphans, and children?

Not important	Somewhat Important		Most Important	
1	2	3	4	5

³ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 29.

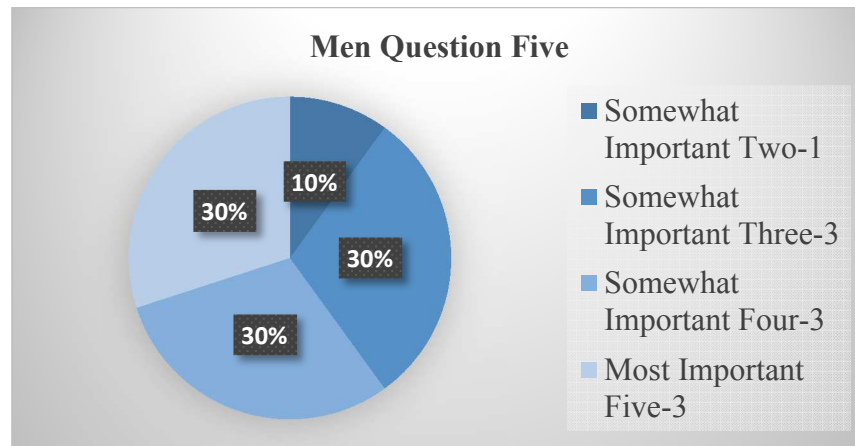


Fig. 19. Men Question Five

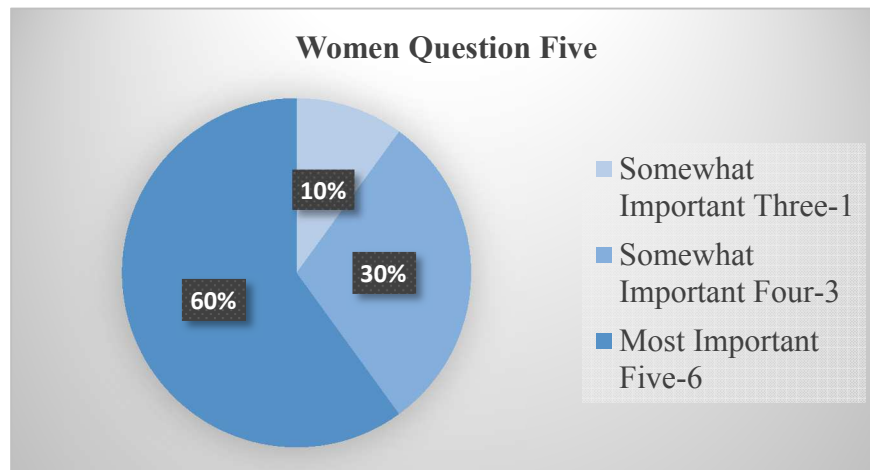


Fig. 20. Women Question Five

This question scored low (30%) for men (figure 19) but high (60%) for women (figure 20) that it was Most Important. For figure 19, only one man chose number two (10%); Somewhat Important for number three (30%); Somewhat Important for number four (30%); and three men said it Most Important for number five (30%).

The women scored higher in this question of how important soul care (needs) is for others, especially widows, orphans, and children as six women (60%) felt it was Most Important

number five. Still, on a higher number of four, three women said it was important, but only one marked number three. Overall, 45% of twenty men and women agreed it was Most Important.

There are several places in the Bible that said widows and children are very important. In 1 Timothy, the author speaks of honoring and caring for them as well as dealing honesty with widows (1 Tim 5:3, 9-11, 16; Luke 20:47). James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” This passage makes very clear that the orphans and widows are to be taken care of. Jesus also states that He did not leave His disciples as orphans (John 14:18) sending the Holy Spirit.

Question Six

How important is intentionally setting aside your time to help needy people?

Not important			Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5	

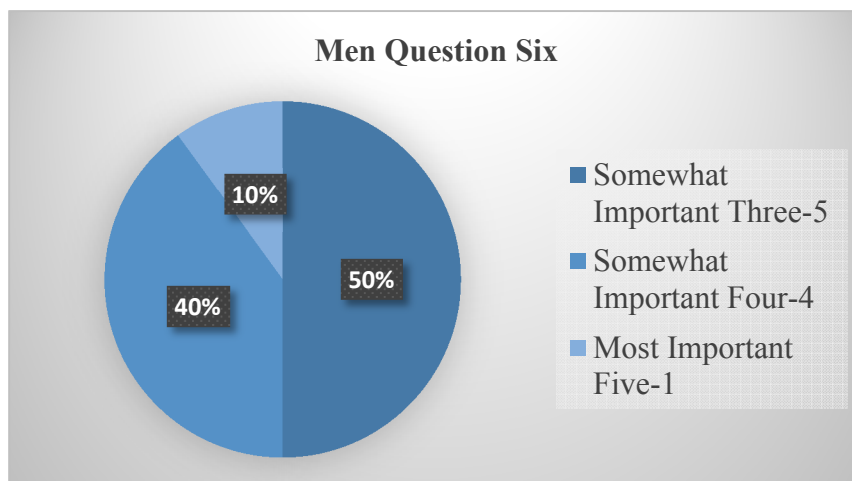


Fig. 21. Men Question Six

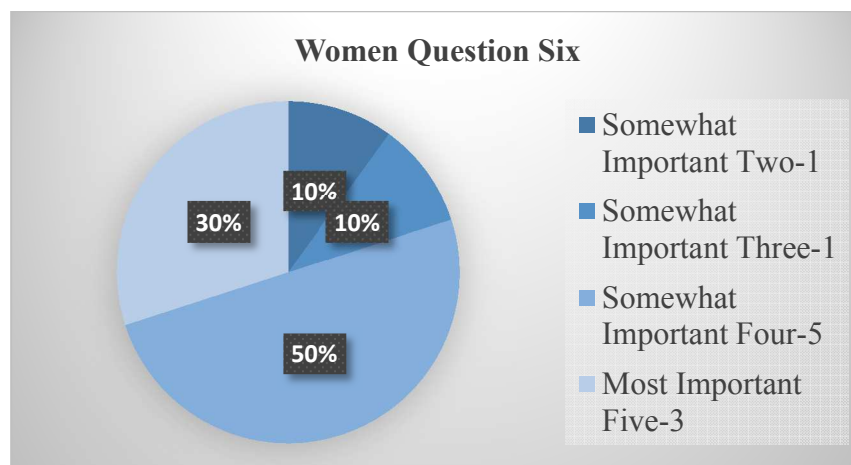


Fig. 22. Women Question Six

This question was all different for intentionally setting aside your time to help needy people. *Intentionally*, means to do something that is planned. Otherwise it will fail to be important. Neither men (figure 21) or women (figure 22) rated this question high; they only circled number five as Most Important for four people (20%) or four people out of twenty. The next highest number was Somewhat Important number four, as four men and five women (9 people, or 45%) out of twenty believed it was important.

It is important to set one's mind to put aside time to help others who are in need. Romans 8:5 states, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

Question Seven

What scale of importance does spiritual vitality (overall spiritual health: God, others, and God-centered self), have to do with community relationships?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

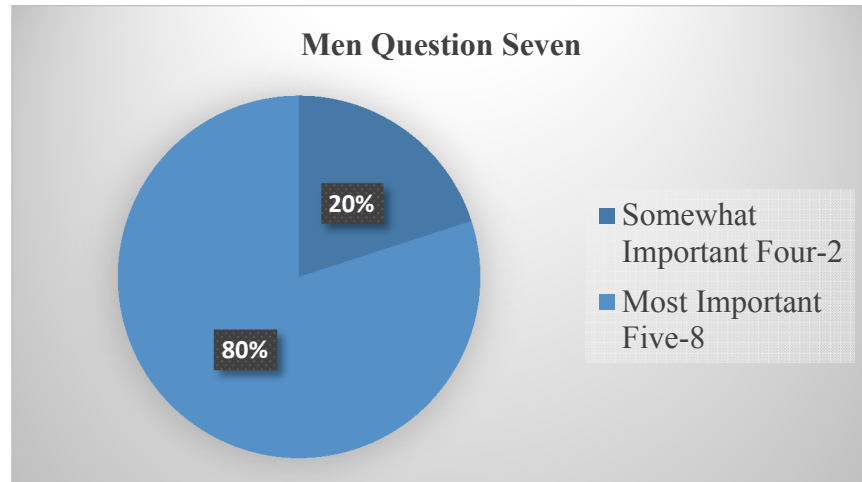


Fig. 23. Men Question Seven

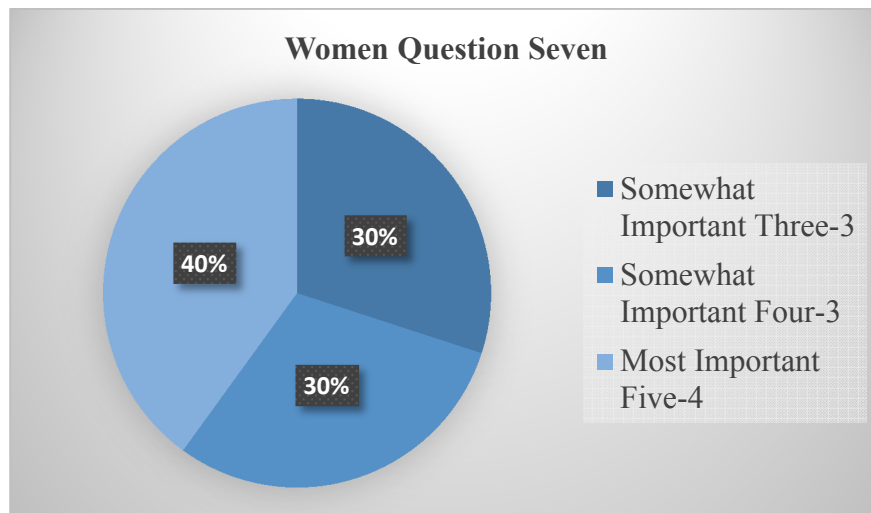


Fig. 24. Women Question Seven

This is an important question for this thesis: “What scale of importance does spiritual vitality (overall spiritual health: God, others, and God-centered self), have to do with community relationships?” For number four and five, ten men (figure 23) and seven women (85%) believed it had high importance (figure 24). Only three people, (15%) out of twenty circled number three of Somewhat Importance.

Another way to look at these answers is out of twenty people eight men and four women circled it was Most Important (60%) when asked if they believed spiritual vitality was important for community relationships. Two men and three women circled Somewhat Important number four. Three other women believed it was Somewhat Important number three.

If a believer walks in the light, they will be healthy in the body, mind and spirit. Scripture states, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Matthew 6: 22-23). Thus, when a person is walking in the light and healthy emotionally, physically, psychologically, and relationally with the Lord and others, he or she will live in Spirit and truth and be restored back to the Father and will be living a holy and blameless life to be kingdom workers.

Question Eight

How important is feeling spiritually rejuvenated after a meeting, having shared time with your spiritual friends?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

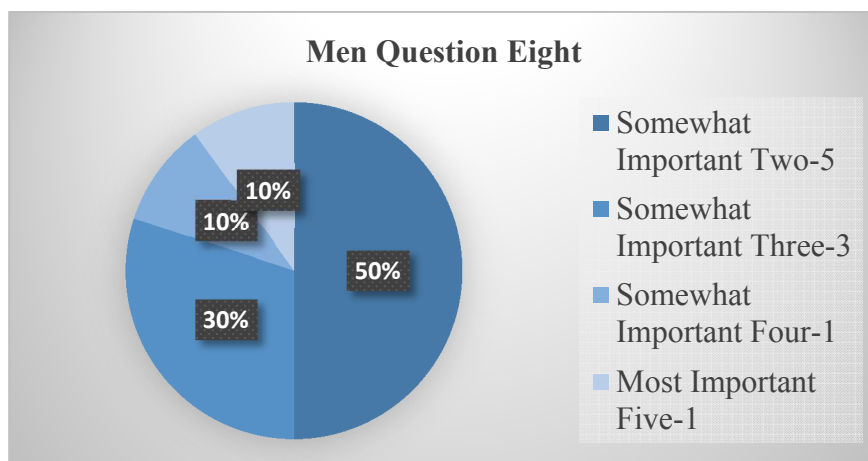


Fig. 25. Men Question Eight

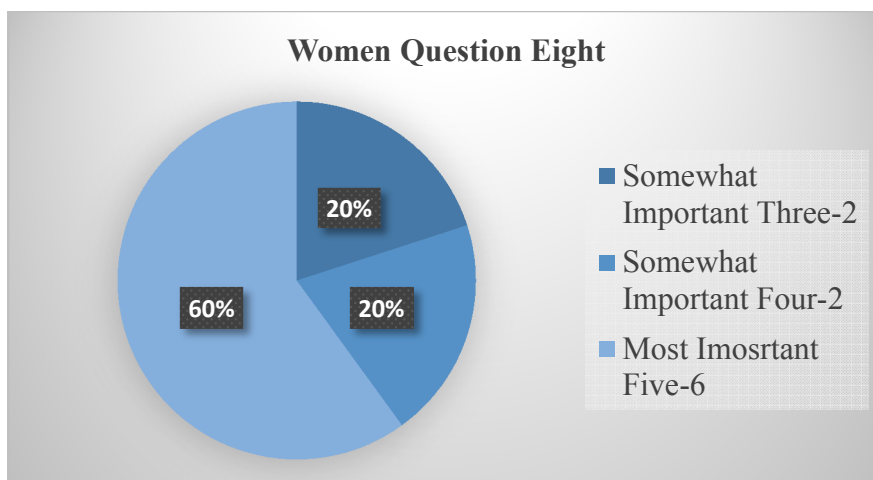


Fig. 26. Women Question Eight

Women (figure 26) placed a higher importance on feeling spiritually rejuvenated after a meeting as six women rated Most Important number five. Five men (50%), scored Somewhat Important on number two (figure 25), while only two women circled number three. Out of twenty people for numbers four and five; overall, ten people (50%) felt it was important. Overall, this question comes out to 50% overall for a high and low score; however, there is a possibility of people not wanting to show their feelings emotionally since they might think it would not be humble before God. When a person comes away from any group meeting and he or she are feeling spiritually rejuvenated, he or she will carry this spirited outlook in whatever he or she does. People will be better prepared to handle any problems that come up, especially if they have stress or illness.

Question Nine

How important is it to express your ideas or concerns for others in this group?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

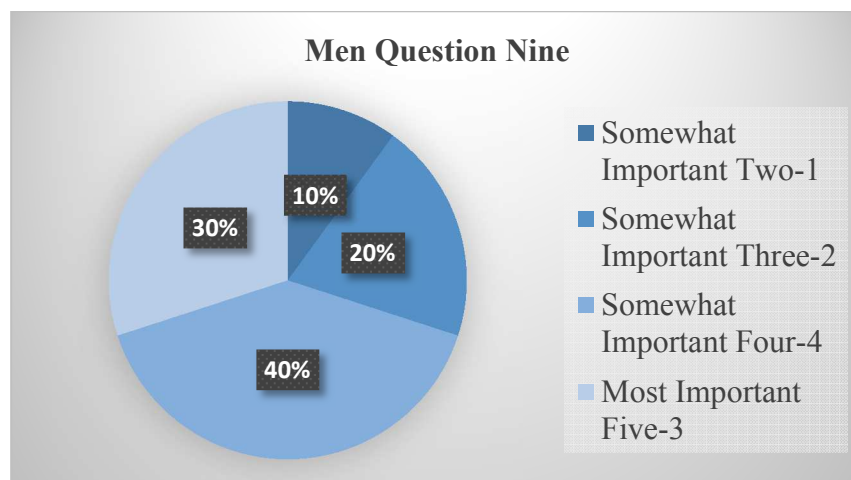


Fig. 27. Men Question Nine

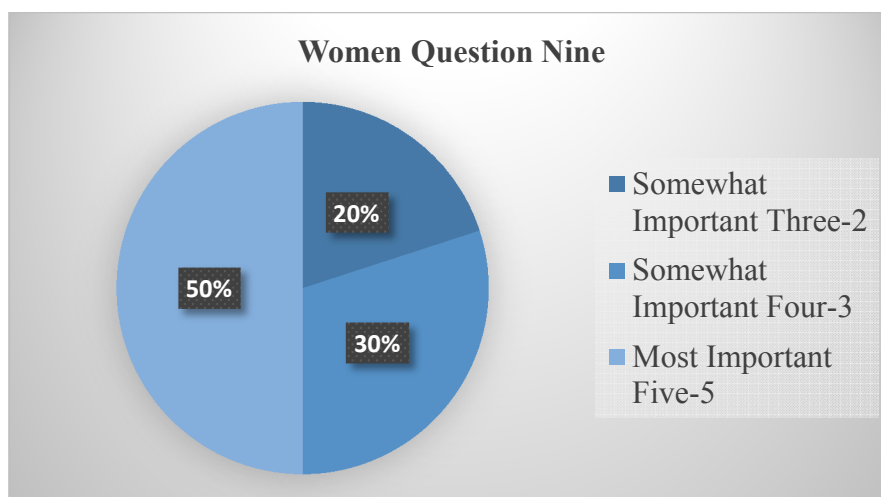


Fig. 28. Women Question Nine

When people express ideas or concerns for others in truth and love, they are usually well-received. Relational soul caregivers express their love for one another by trying to help and give encouragement. Believers should be looking out for one other's interests, not just their own (Phil 2:4). Also, speaking in truth should always be for the "good of others" (1 Cor 10:24).

The men (figure 27) had low scores having only three people (30%) circling Most Important; however, four people (40%) rated number four as Somewhat Important. For the men,

for Somewhat Important numbers four and five is at 70% and it is similar with the women at 80%. Therefore, adding together the men and women is fifteen people out of twenty, or 75% overall. This means even if the men had lower scores, it still was agreed that expressing ideas or concerns for others was important.

The women (figure 28) individually scored high within their group. Three women believed it was Somewhat Important for number four, but five women (50%) said it was Most Important as they circled number five. Believers should be like Paul, who says in 1 Corinthians 10:33, “just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”

Question Ten

How important to you is regularly attending church?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

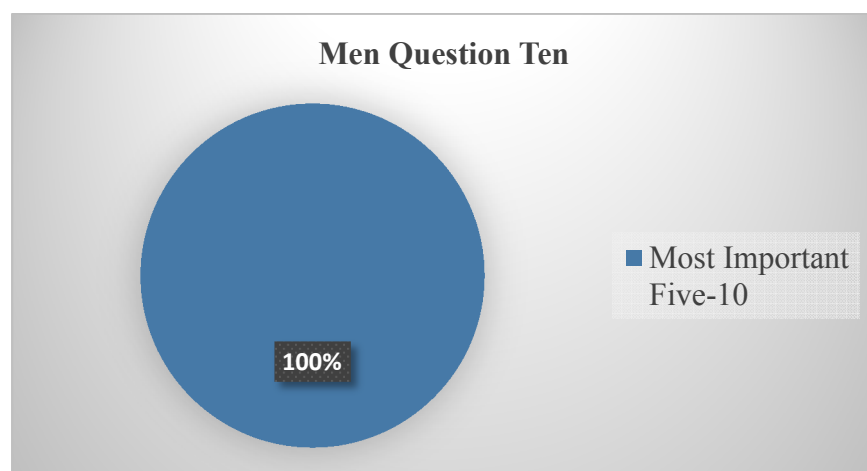


Fig. 29. Men Question Ten

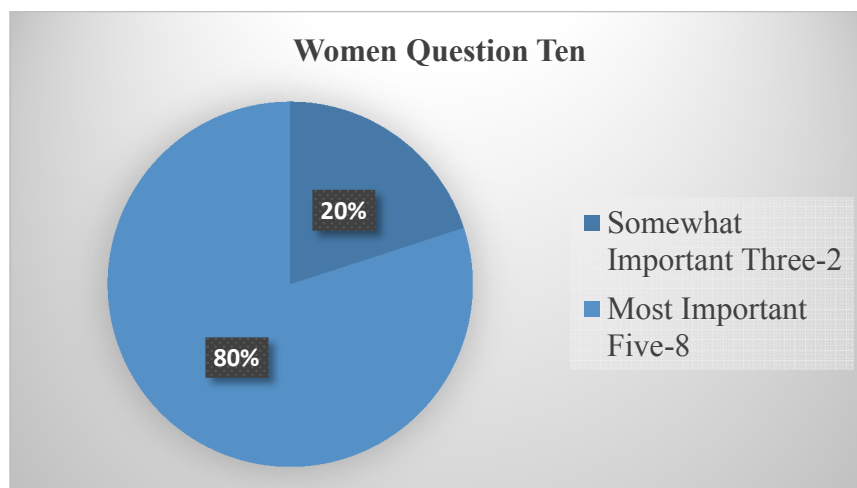


Fig. 30. Women Question Ten

The men (figure 29) rated this question Most Important number five, with all ten people (100%) in agreement. The women (figure 30), however, believed the same, except two women chose number three of Somewhat Important. Overall, eighteen out of twenty (90%) soul caregivers rated regularly attending church as Most Important. The key is *regularly* attending church.

The first Christians met “day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). It is important for them to be regularly attending church, as this is a place for “devoting themselves” to the teaching of Jesus, fellowship with other believers, and praying for one another (Acts 2:42). Being consistent by worshiping daily and communing with each other will help build up one another to fight against evil. It will also help with personal accountability and strengthening the Body of Christ for the glory of God.

Question Eleven

How important is your spiritual development in this group?

Not important

Somewhat Important

Most Important

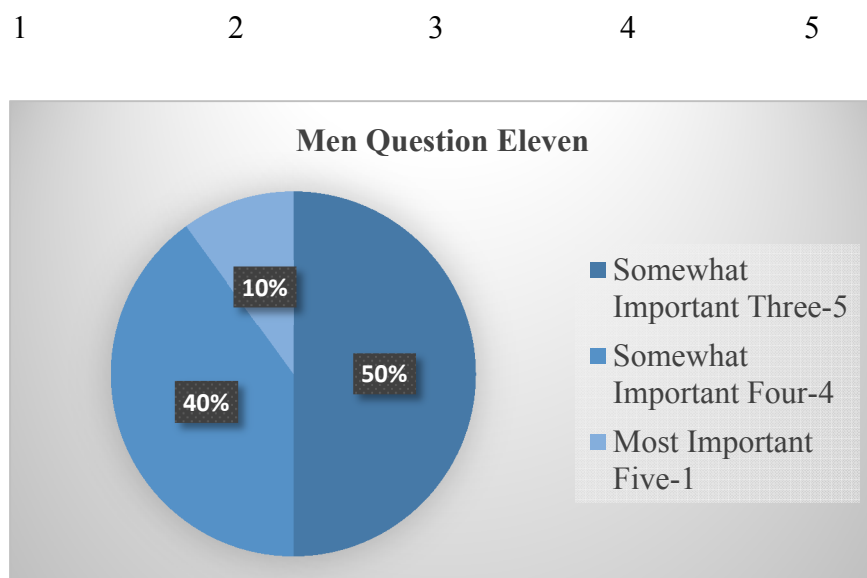


Fig. 31. Men Question Eleven

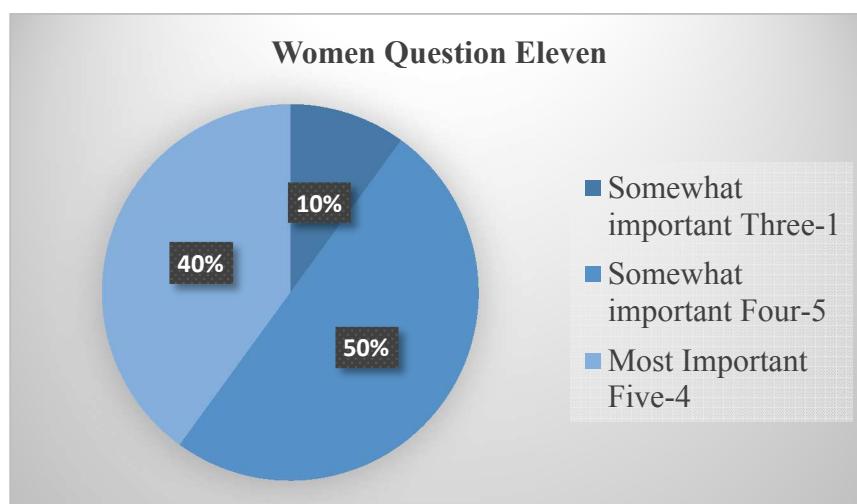


Fig. 32. Women Question Eleven

Paul believed people needed to grow and mature in Christ. If one is healthy in mind, body and spirit, spiritual maturity can only benefit believers. Paul says, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Pet 2:2). When a person

is spiritually rejuvenated, it will boost their confidence and they grow more mature in the Lord; this is what God wants believers to do as kingdom workers.

Being mature in Christ, is “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15). This means that the ones “who are [spiritually] mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you” (Phil 3:15). In relationships, speaking in truth and love will rejuvenate God’s children towards loving one another, which is the second greatest commandment.

Both groups of participants (figures 31 and 32) that circled numbers four and five as Somewhat Important and Most important (fifteen people out of twenty or 75%) agree that spiritual development is important. As each Christian becomes healthier, they grow to “be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” to be witnesses for God’s mission (Jas 1:4).

Question Twelve

How important is it for your group to engage with the Bible and/or devotion?

Not important

Somewhat Important

Most Important

1

2

3

4

5

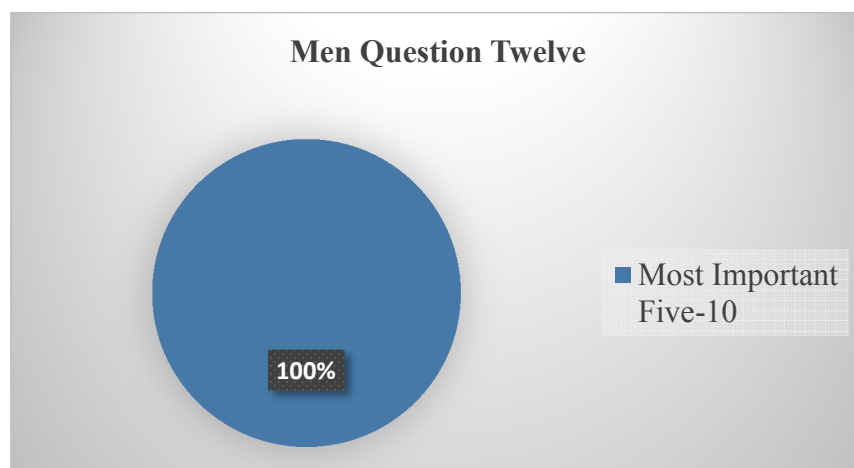
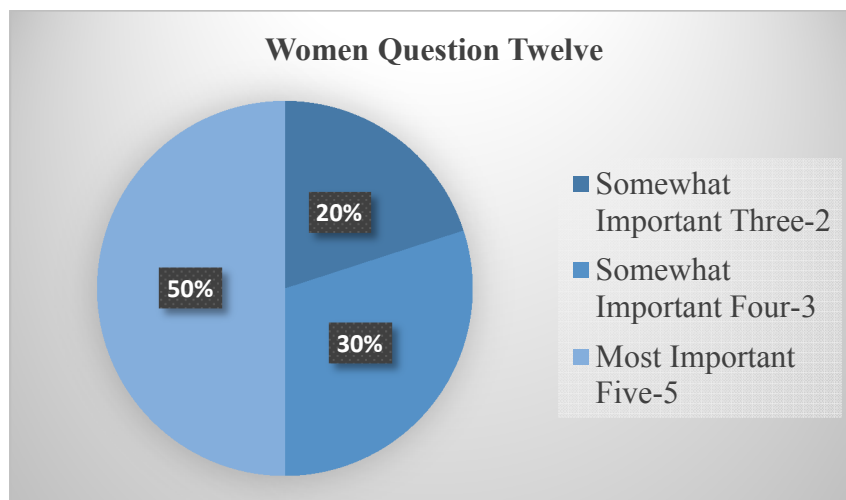


Fig. 33. Men Question Twelve**Fig. 34. Women Question Twelve**

The men (figure 33) had a unanimous agreement (100%) that it was important for reading the Bible or devotion in their fellowship group. In the women's group (figure 34), five people (50%) agreed it was Most Important. Another five women circled numbers three and four as Somewhat Important. Overall, circling Somewhat Important numbers four and five for both genders was (90%) eighteen out of twenty.

Question Thirteen

How important is meeting for retreats or outings out of church for continued fellowship (2 or more people)?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important	
1	2	3	4	5	

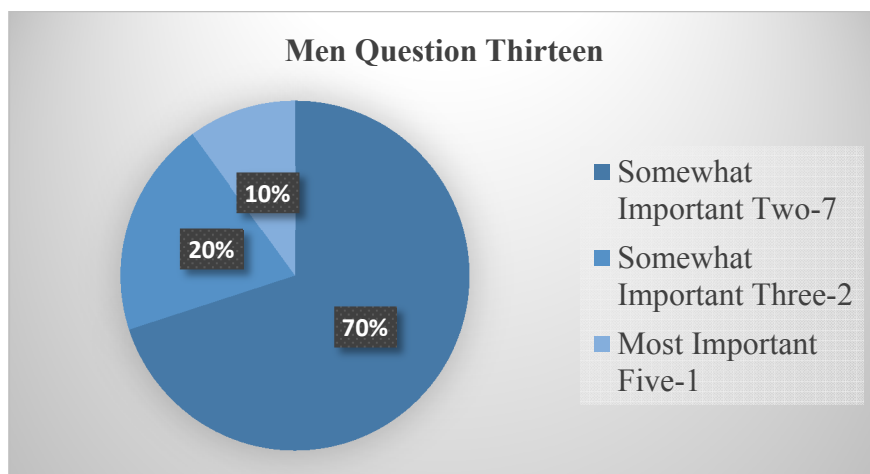


Fig. 35. Men Question Thirteen

The men's group (figure 35) rated outings for fellowship outside of church on the low end. Only one man out of ten agreed it was Most Important. The other nine people said it was Somewhat Important. Overall, on the reverse side (sixteen people out of twenty) for Somewhat Important circling number two, three, and four (80%) did not agree it was Most Important for fellowship outside of church. On the other hand, the women indicated that it was important circling numbers three, four, and five, as ten women believed it was (100%) important.

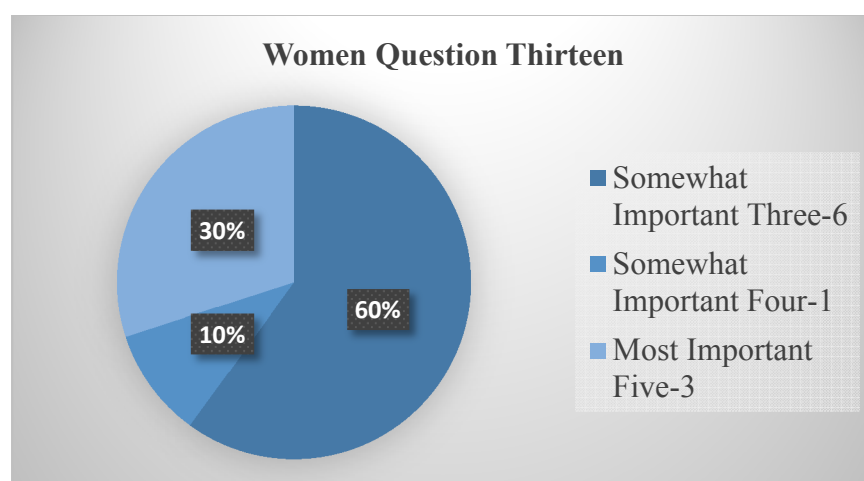


Fig. 36 Women Question Thirteen

Question Fourteen

How important is it for you to feel you have emotional support from spiritual friends?

Not important

Somewhat Important

Most Important

1

2

3

4

5

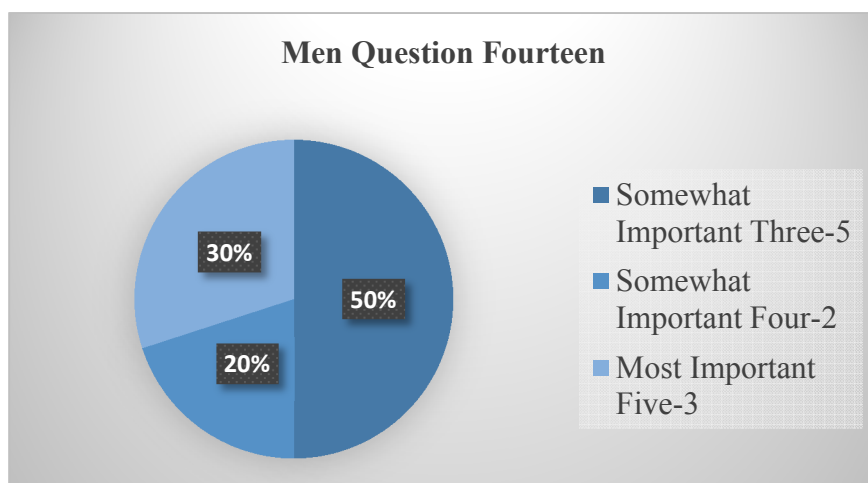


Fig. 37. Men Question Fourteen

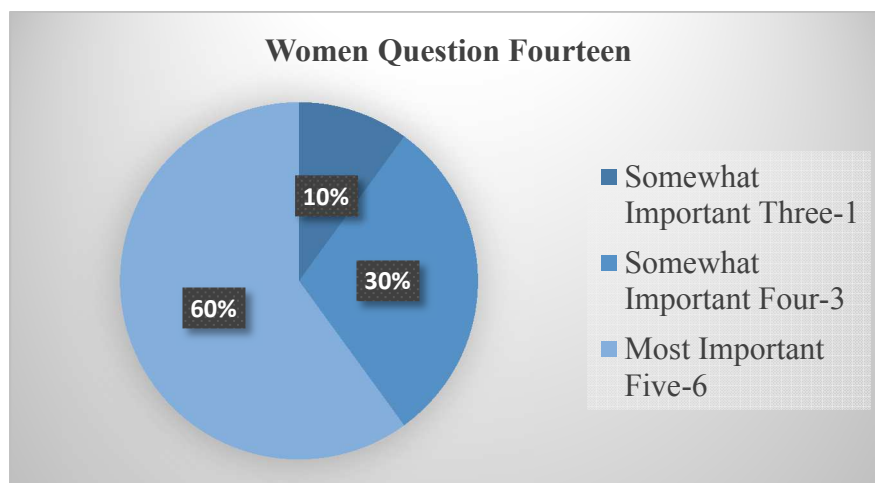


Fig. 38. Women Question Fourteen

The men (figure 37) scored lower than women (figure 38). In this instance, only three men believed emotional support from spiritual friends was Most Important, while six women felt stronger it was Most Important. Overall, for numbers four and five, fourteen people out of twenty (70%) felt it was important receiving emotional support for one another.

Life is an emotional cycle, but when someone needs encouragement or a helping hand during difficult times, relational soul care can make a difference in one's thoughts. In times of grief or crisis, having people to surround believers in love and truth will show that soul caregivers are God's hands and feet. John 13:34-35 states that Jesus said when believers show love and compassion, "all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Question Fifteen

How important is being in community relational groups to help each other grow in faith emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

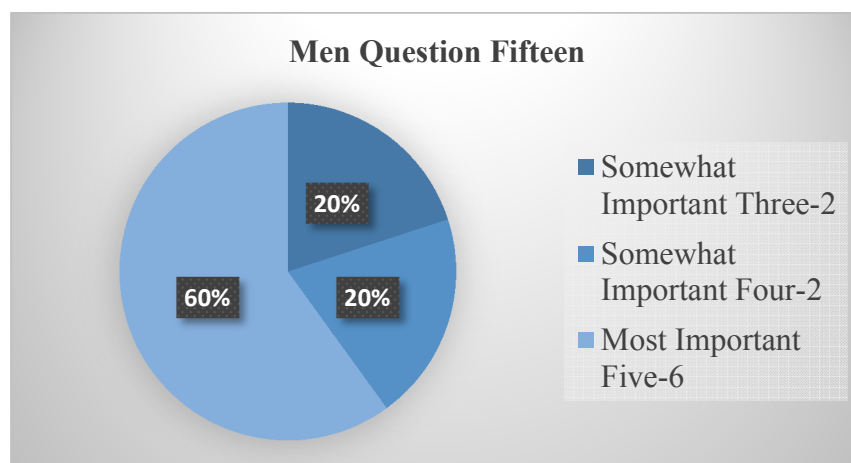


Fig. 39. Men Question Fifteen

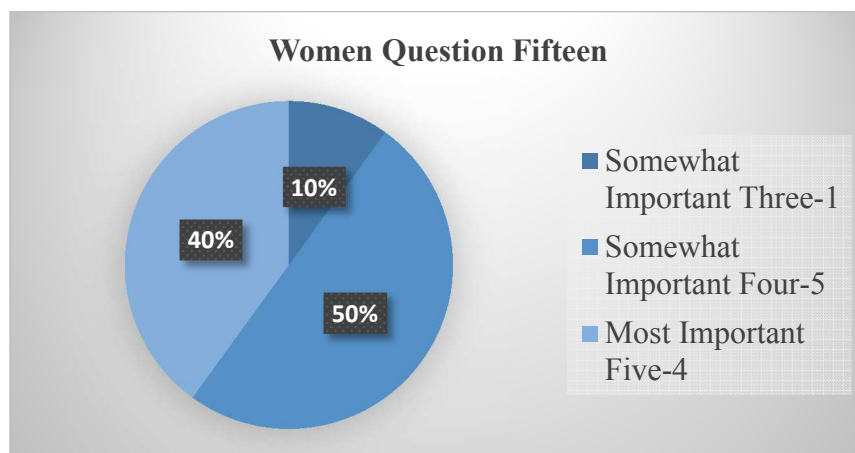


Fig. 40. Women Question Fifteen

This question shows different ways one could relate in a fellowship group. Six men (figure 39) believed stronger than the woman (figure 40) as they circled number five as Most Important. The women had a strong number five that was Most Important, which added four more people for ten overall. The results were seventeen out of twenty (85%) believed it was important for community fellowship groups to help each other grow in faith: emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually.

Question Sixteen

How important is having social support helping others to spiritual vitality?

Not important	Somewhat Important		Most Important	
1	2	3	4	5

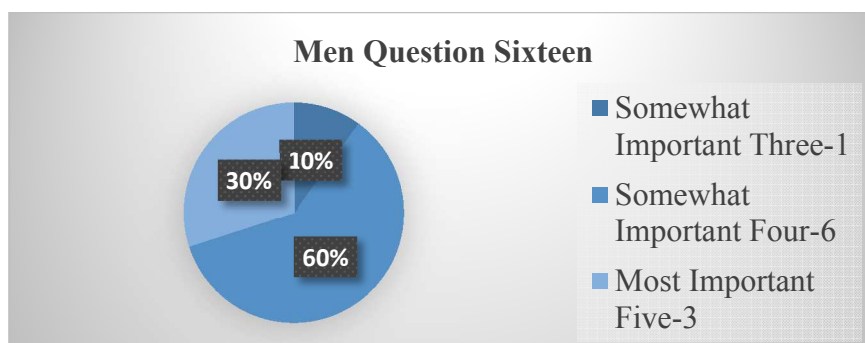
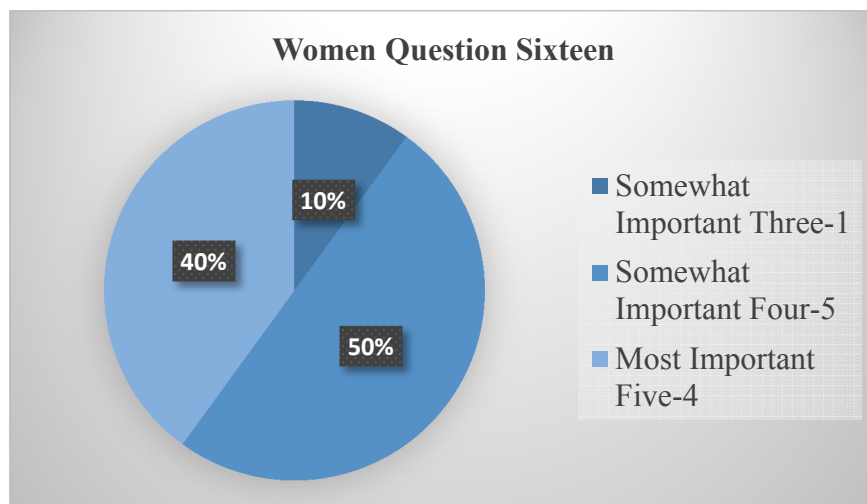


Fig. 41. Men Question Sixteen**Fig. 42. Women Question Sixteen**

Having social support helping others to spiritual vitality shows strong influence for both genders (figures 41 and 42). It is not necessarily most important, but it is very important. The men only had one more person circle number four as Somewhat Important, otherwise the ratings were almost identical for the two groups. Overall, twenty people believed (100%) using numbers three, four, and five that it was important for social support to help others to spiritual vitality.

Question Seventeen

How important are spiritual relationships in adding to your self-esteem and/or identity?

Not important

Somewhat Important

Most Important

1

2

3

4

5

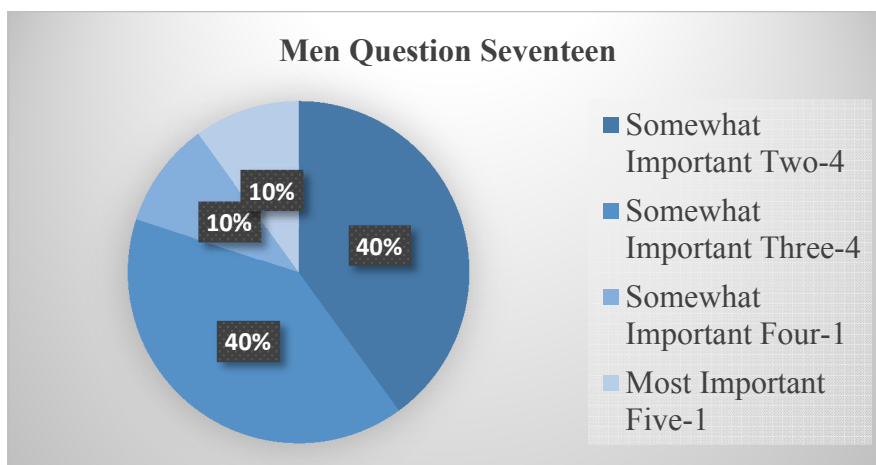


Fig. 43. Men Question Seventeen

The men (figure 42) were scattered for the statistics. The only option that the men did not circle was number one as not important. The numbers revealed that self-esteem or identity was not very important for spiritual relationships. The men scored eight out of ten or 80% for numbers two and three for Somewhat Important; however, eight women (figure 44) decided numbers four and five were very important.

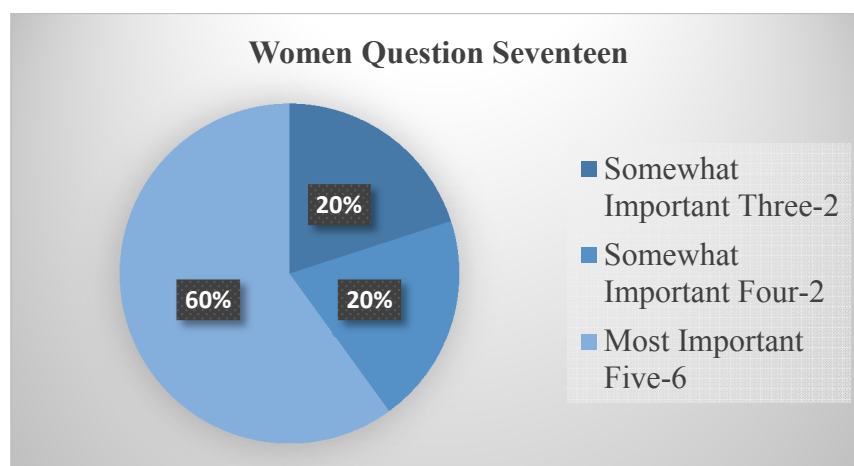


Fig. 44. Women Question Seventeen

Question Eighteen

How important is experiencing God by engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, devotion, singing, or reading the Bible with others in this group?

Not important Somewhat Important Most Important

1 2 3 4 5

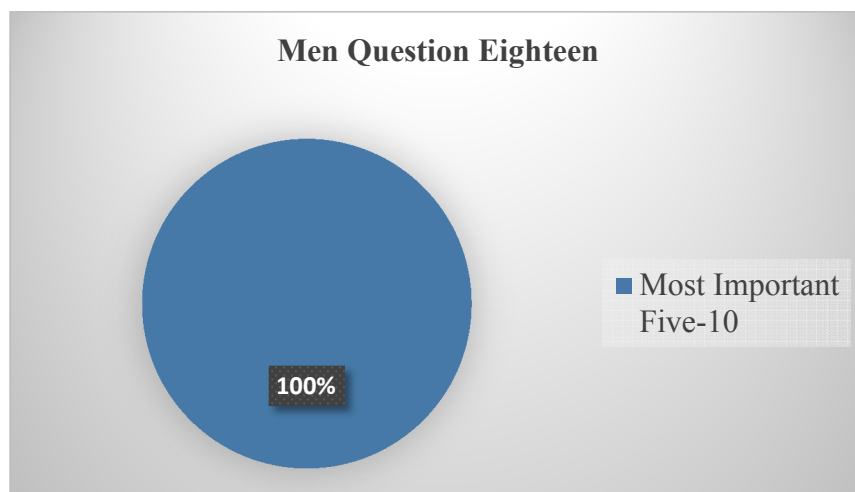


Fig. 45. Men Question Eighteen

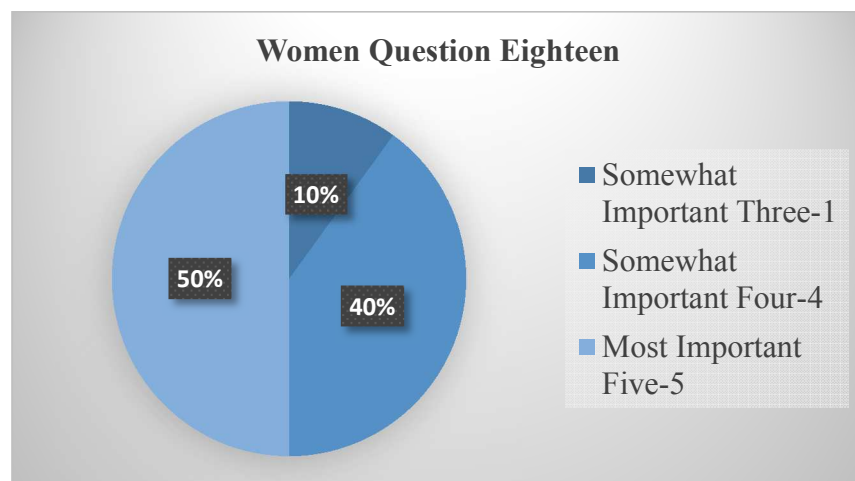


Fig. 46. Women Question Eighteen

Both men and women (figures 45 and 46) believed experiencing God by engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, devotion, singing, or reading the Bible with others was

important. Spiritual practices help believers to experience God by aligning their thoughts (same mind) with the Lord. Being like-minded brings unity to believers who will experience the same love, joy, encouragement, perseverance, peace, and love of the same Lord (Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 8:19, 13:11; Phil 2:2).

Believers are to make melody worshiping in their hearts by “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). Also, God’s children are to admonish each another by “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord [with their hearts]” (Eph 5:19).

The men agreed 100% with Question Eighteen, but five women backed off just a little with numbers three and four as Somewhat Important. Only five women agreed that number five was Most Important. Overall, this question was very important that nineteen people out of twenty (95%) said it was important for spiritual practices in fellowship groups to experience God.

Question Nineteen

How important do you feel it is to use your spiritual gifts for others?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

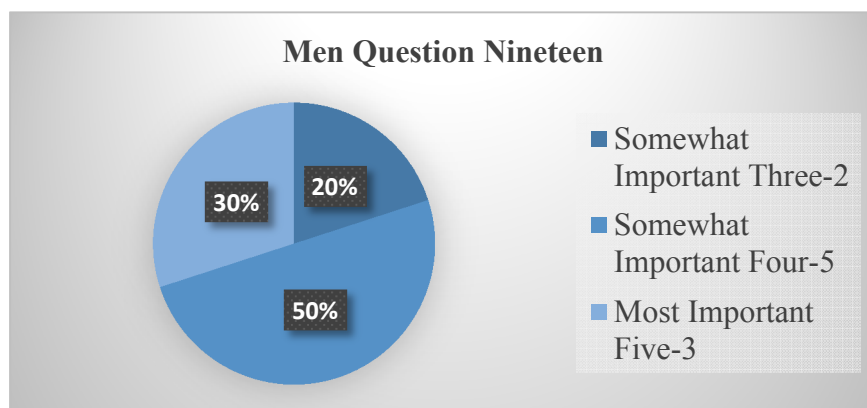
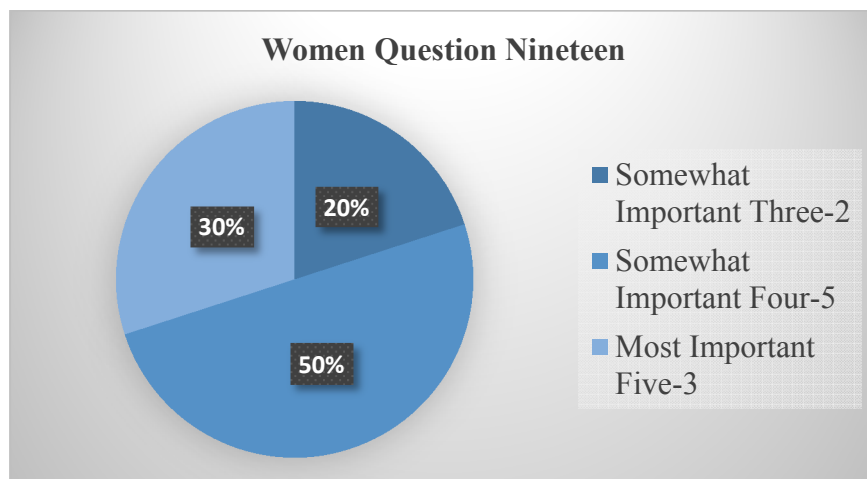


Fig. 47. Men Question Nineteen**Fig. 48. Women Question Nineteen**

Question nineteen is the only question in this questionnaire that both men and women (figures 47 and 48) scored the same. For scale number three, there were only four people (out of twenty people) for Somewhat Important (20%). For number four for both groups, were ten people out of twenty (50 %) for Somewhat Important. Finally, for Most Important, only six people out of twenty (30%) believed to use their spiritual gifts for others. God gives His children different spiritual gifts to use for the kingdom of God.

Spiritual gifts are very important and God gave at least one to every person. 1 Peter 4:10 states that “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Every person is different: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.”⁴

Question Twenty

⁴ Romans 12:6.

How important do you feel it is to the family of God that community relationships add to members' overall spiritual development (vitality)?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

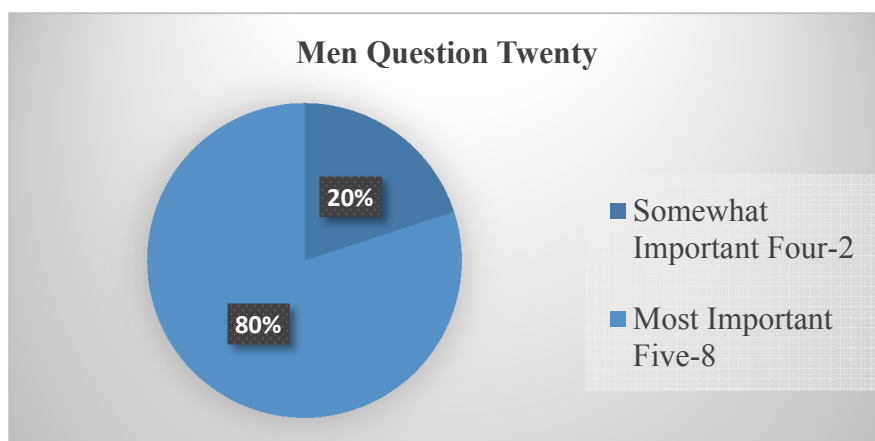


Fig. 49. Men Question Twenty

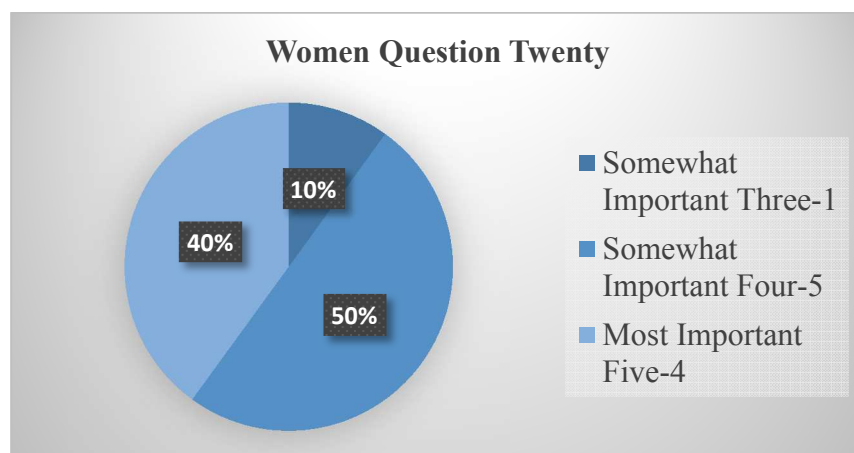


Fig. 50. Women Question Twenty

This question is vital to this researcher's thesis as it analyzes the importance of community relationships overall spiritual development (vitality). If one looks at the soul caregivers' answers to the questions, the participants believe soul care relationships are

important. Using scale numbers three, four, and five for all twenty people (figures 49 and 50) agree (100%) that community soul care relationships overall add to spiritual development (vitality). However, just on a scale of Most Important for question twenty, overall twelve people out of twenty (60%) believe community relationships added to spiritual vitality.

Believers are part of the Body of Christ, as members of one body. The Body of Christ is “members one of another” (Eph 4:25). Paul says, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Col 3:15). Community relational soul caregivers (spiritual fellowship) help one another to grow to maturity in grace and love while shepherding one another to spiritual vitality.

Part two of this questionnaire will include similar statistics for the community questions. For this section, this writer compares other research material with the results from the relational soul care questionnaire from the twin study for men and women for further in-depth revelation.

Part 2: Relational Soul Care Questionnaire Research

The second part of the questionnaire results will conjoin all the statistics with other current research statistics that line up with this researcher’s questionnaire. It will show other research for balancing pertinent questions for understanding community relational soul caregivers.

Question One: Priority

Circle the highest priority in your life right now.

This question can be answered very simply. Matthew 22:37 states, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The Lord Jesus made this statement a command. George Barna states that the “primary purpose of life is to love

God completely” and it is the “most important task.”⁵ He says that according to one survey, the American view for putting family first before God was “56%,” but it is not the biblical view.⁶ The Bible also says to have no other gods before Him. The covenant is renewed, but God says, “for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exod 34:14).

There is only one right answer to this question even though the choices are: career, education, health, family, and God. The answer is God because He is the One who created everything and only “The LORD [can] watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight” (Gen 31:49). It is not family, health or anything else that can take the place of God as He is the one that controls everything (Heb 2:8). Jesus Christ is the one who heals (Acts 9:34), heals all diseases (Ps 103:3), and heals the brokenhearted (Ps 147:3).

If believers let aspects of the flesh, such as worldly things (career, education, or health), control them, they are not surrendering to God. Romans 8:9 states, “You, however, are controlled not by the flesh, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

Question Two: Relationships with God and Others

In your women’s/men’s group (circle gender), whether designed for fellowship, evangelism and/or organizational duties, how important as image bearers of the Triune God, who rely on the Holy Spirit, is the aim to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another?

The focus of this question is how important is it to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another? In the restoration of humankind, God

⁵ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 21.

⁶ Ibid.

sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, who is now the mediator (John 14:6). God wanted a love relationship with His creation, so there would be a union with God and with mankind again. It is a love relationship with God and others. Henry Blackaby and Melvin Blackaby say, “First John 1:3-7 tells us that fellowship with God results in fellowship with God’s people” and that this relationship with God “(*koinonia*)” is the “same quality we have with one another.”⁷

Furthermore, Issler discusses that “genuine kingdom living” in Matthew 7:12, for relationships with God and others; he says that in this passage for spiritual transformation admonishes believers “respect” for one another.⁸ He states,

Regarding our interactions with others, genuine kingdom living involves treating others with respect and dignity, in a posture of invitation and request rather than domination and presumption, without judgmentalism, hypocrisy, or trying to fix others. Thus, we relate to others as we want to be treated. (The principle is also applied to our prayer relationship with God).⁹

Genuine relational kingdom living is developed within the community of believers. Relational soul caregivers do not fix others; they love others by walking along beside them to help guide them to God. Jesus is the One who will fix anything they need.

Matthew 15:21-28 shows this passage was about the Canaanite woman and Jesus as she wanted Jesus to come heal her daughter, Jesus did heal her daughter. According to Melanie Baffes, she looks at this passage that it was about humanity. Baffes said Jesus and the woman engaged in a “reciprocal exchange” in relationships about humanity.¹⁰ In this exchange of dialog from a relational point, Baffes says, “this perspective opens up new possibilities for us today in

⁷ Blackaby and Blackaby, *A God Centered Church*, 36.

⁸ Issler, “Six Themes,” 369.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Melanie Baffes, “What Do We Do with This Jesus? A Reading of Matthew 15:21-28 Through the Lens of Psychoanalytic Theory,” *Pastoral Psychol* no. 63 (2014): 252, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

understanding what it means to love ourselves, love others and love God.”¹¹ This understanding will result in a genuine relationship with God and others in loving *agape* style.

All relationships must have a reciprocal dialog, even if it is non-verbal. Baffes said her findings was about the context between God and humans, and the true-self and others.¹² Matthew 7: 21-28 shows that kingdom living is about God and relationships with one another.

Question Three: Shepherding One Another

Is shepherding each other important for serving in community relational soul care (needs for one another)?

So, what is the point of shepherding one another in community? It is to help each other to grow in love, give encouragement to others, and to help them grow to be mature Christians for their lifelong journey doing God’s kingdom work. Jesus says loving one another is the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39). Loving is a broad answer; however, one cannot love another person as told before, if they ignore the person’s needs. Being relational and helping each other through life is shepherding one another.

Shepherding each other had low scores for men for the researcher survey; however, the women placed four times stronger greater value on this aspect. Also, Krause et al. say that helping each other is healthy for people as “support from fellow church members offsets the noxious effects of stress...bolsters feelings of life satisfaction...and is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility.”¹³

Question Four: Missional, Kingdom-minded

¹¹ Baffes, “What Do We Do with This Jesus?” 252.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Neal Krause et al., “Gratitude to God, Self-Rated Health, and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2014): 342, accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org>.

How important is doing God's work for the kingdom; to build up, encourage one another, all for strengthening the body of Christ for God's mission?

This question can partly be answered from the last question. Everyone is called to do the work of the kingdom, not just ones who have degrees in ministry. It starts with having a relationship with God and spreads to others, which means loving one's neighbor. George Barna says that in 1998 "four out of five people say they have a good comprehension of basic Christian teachings and principles," but in his survey, "less than one out of ten are able to correctly identify what the New Testament teaches...that relates to life."¹⁴ According to Barna's survey and analysis, if one does not know the fundamental teachings and principles of Scripture, then how can the Body of Christ for God's mission be built up?

According to Scott Thumma and Warren Bird from The Beck Group, they discuss that the megachurches "rate very high in clarity of mission and purpose" at "79%."¹⁵ Moreover, the megachurches rose to "81% in 2015" in missions;" however, for "missions, world missions, and social outreach," they have increased by 4% since 2010, which is now at "eighteen percent."¹⁶ All churches are commanded to be mission oriented (Matt 28:19).

Question Five: Soul Care

How important is soul care (needs) for others, especially widows, orphans, and children?

It is very important to care for one another, especially the ones who are not strong.

¹⁴ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 25.

¹⁵ The Beck Group, "Recent Shifts in America's Protestant Churches: Megachurches 2015 Report," *Leadership Network and Hartford Institute*, 3, last modified July 25, 2017, accessed December 10, 2016, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/2015_Megachurches_Report.pdf.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

Easley and Morgan voice that helping God's children is "intentional involvement in the lives of others" from community "taking responsibility for keeping one another out of spiritual trouble caring for and preserving one another."¹⁷

James 1:27 states that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." The Thomas Nelson Study Bible shows that the people mentioned in James 1:27, "were among the most unprotected and needy classes" from "ancient society" and still today.¹⁸

Soul care is also very important. Soul care expert Larry Crabb believes "Soul talk is the language of soul care," and it is "another way to look into the interior world of the soul...into the souls of all the people we love."¹⁹ He says there are five stages of soul care talk: "think beneath (see their battle); think vision (plan of the Spirit); think passion (deal with your issues before helping others); think story (listen to their story); and "think movement (follow the Spirit)."²⁰ From these steps, the language of soul care talk can be modified to organize a fellowship pattern in community relational soul care to help others to spiritual vitality.

Question Six: Intentionally Helping

How important is intentionally setting aside your time to help needy people?

In a 2014 Canadian study from LifeWay Research, 5,000 North American believers who go to church filled out a relational survey. One of the goals of the study was to look at the habits and attitudes of community. One question in the relational survey consists of "building relationships" that reveals do "I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship and

¹⁷ Easley and Morgan, *The Community of Jesus*, 130.

¹⁸ Nelson, *NKJV Know the Study Bible*, Kindle.

¹⁹ Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk: Speaking with Power into the Lives of Others* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2003), 29.

²⁰ Ibid. 30.

interact with other believers” with “40%” saying they do and “34%” saying they did not.”²¹ The survey had a comment: “The Bible frames relationships among believers as a proactive investment in other Christians” and use Scripture in “Hebrews 10:24 [that] refers to the need to exhibit concern for other Christians in ways that encourage love and good works.”²²

Going back to the thesis questions with 20 participants, Question Six showed 100% saying that helping needy people (good works) was important. Four people out of twenty (20%) said it was Most Important. These statistics are still low in number compared to either survey for intentionally helping others.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America intentionally help others and gave to disability ministries “\$167,000,” but gave “\$64 million” to alleviate world hunger.²³ There are many church denominations that intentionally help others whether they are small or large. They are not in worldwide statistics; however, God knows who they are to help His children. It is important to help others and this builds relationships by interacting with others.

Question Seven: Spiritual Health

What scale of importance does spiritual vitality (overall spiritual health: God, others, and God-centered self), have to do with community relationships?

In 2001, Hartford Institute of Religion Research study comprised of “200 questions and 41 denominations” state that for a healthy congregation it must “have a clear sense of mission” to have spiritual vitality and a growing healthy congregation.²⁴ Without God’s mission, there is no

²¹ LifeWay Research, “Church Relationships are Missing Something.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, “2016 Campaign Report,” last modified 2016, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://elca.org>.

²⁴ Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, “A Report on Religion in the United States 2001,” *Hartford Institute of Religion Research*, last modified March 2001, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://hirr.hartsem.edu>.

mission. Furthermore, without a healthy relationship with God, one cannot have a healthy relationship with others.

When the Hartford Research study was updated in 2015, David Roozen saw clear challenges for the churches. He says, “growth and spiritual vitality go together” for the church, but it has grown only two percent in the last five years being at 35% out of 32,000 congregations selected from all Protestants faiths like Lutherans, Baptists, and Methodists.²⁵ However, for Protestant churches, Roozen says that in American congregations’ spiritual vitality was at “26.6%” in 2005.”²⁶ He says the most consistent differences over the last “fifteen years” for members for spiritual health in community are the “strong relationship” and “positive experience of worship,” which brings people in or out of church and nurture each other.²⁷ The conclusion is that spiritual health for the Body of Christ is not very healthy overall, but is surviving and growing when believers fellowship and worship in their church.

George Barna also did a study on how people worship as well as a survey for using technology. Believers preferred to use the Bible print version in “2011 at 89% and in 2017 at 91%.”²⁸ Christians also use other means of technology for engaging in the Bible. Barna did a survey of “2, 030 people in January and February 2017,” gauging Bible references for: internet (2011 at 37% verses 2017 at 55%), cell phone (2011 at 18% verses 2017 at 53%), and podcast (2011 at 18% verses 2017 at 36%).”²⁹

²⁵ David Roozen, “American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving,” *Hartford Institute of Religion Research*, 3, last modified 2015, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ George Barna, “State of the Bible 2017: Top Findings,” Barna Group, last modified July 25, 2017, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-bible-2017-top-findings/>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Question Eight: Spirituality Rejuvenated

How important is feeling spiritually rejuvenated after a meeting, having shared time with your spiritual friends?

According to The Beck Group of 2015, “79% of people out of 2696” megachurches say, “small groups are central to their strategy of Christian nurture and spiritual formation.”³⁰ So, in the statistics for “nurturing of people’s faith,” the megachurches rated higher at “54% and other congregations at 36%.”³¹ Also, with this data in mind, usually the larger the church, the more nurturing of God’s people. The megachurches feel that small groups are vital to the growth, mission, and vitality, and says “40% of the adults in these congregation[s] are involved in small groups.”³² So, are larger churches really the answer? It appears that small churches are vital. They have groups that can do everything a large church does (except perhaps financially).

This researcher has found little data how Christians spiritual rejuvenation is monitored after a meeting. For this researcher’s thesis, seven people out of twenty (35%) rated this question Most Important. The data on megachurches for small groups, shows that they are intentional in aiming believers to be spiritually healthy. The statistics show the “more intentional megachurches are about small groups, the greater spiritual vitality at 77%.”³³ Overall, the data suggests relationships in small groups reveal more spiritual vitality.

There is not enough data to really compare this question. From the research, feeling spiritually rejuvenated appears to be highly important for small groups in megachurches. There should be daily rejuvenation for people to feel the love of God and power of the Holy Spirit. The

³⁰ The Beck Group, “Recent Shifts in America’s,” 1-2.

³¹ Ibid., 2.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Beck Group suggests relationships in small groups reveal believers are rejuvenated to spiritual vitality.

Table 1.12 presents the following Bible study model based on the Spirit of the Lord in Isaiah 11:2, which states, “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.” Believers are to seek the Spirit of the living Lord for developing spiritual maturity:

Table 1.12 The Spirit of the Lord

<u>Spirit of the Lord</u> : “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18; 2 Cor 3:17); rely on Holy Spirit for power and guidance in direction and decisions (Mark 1:2); “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Eph 6:10); and “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7).
<u>Spirit of wisdom</u> : discernment (Prov 17:24); God’s wisdom “Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24); “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30); and “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph 1:17).
<u>Spirit of understanding</u> : Spirit will reveal understandings of God (1 Cor 2:10) and give us discernment for others (Prov 8:9; 14:6).
<u>Spirit of counsel</u> : “comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31); “encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy” (Phil 2:1); and “comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor 1:4).

Spirit of might: “I love you, O LORD, my strength” (Ps 18:1); “O my Strength, I will sing praises to you” (Ps 59:17); “The LORD is my strength and my shield” (Ps 28:7); and “LORD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation” (Exod 15:2).

Spirit of knowledge: Spirit reveals knowledge of God’s Will; and Spirit of understanding seeks knowledge (Prov 15:14; Dan 2:21).

Spirit of the fear of the Lord: “You shall fear [revere] the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear” (Deut 10:20).

Question Nine: Express Concerns for Others

How important is it to express your ideas or concerns for others in this group?

Christians are called to be concerned for one another (Phil 2:3-4). It is in brotherly love to be concerned for others (Rom 12:10): “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:12).

Furthermore, Hebrews 10:24 states, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” The next verse continues to say to “meet together” and encourage each other (Heb 10:25). Relational soul caregivers naturally fellowship with other believers for their concerns for one another. This is a very important part of loving one another (2 John 7) and imitating Christ (2 John 6, 28).

Question Ten: Church Attendance

How important to you is regularly attending church?

The Beck Group, interviewed megachurches for their research. They showed that with 2,000 or more attending, they are having their challenges because their research indicates they

are having fewer attendance. The data suggests it was higher in the year “2000 at 91%” compared to the survey in 2015 at 82%.”³⁴

There are problems when giving numbers for church attendance. Cynthia Woolever et al. reveal that the “self-reports of worship attendance may introduce biases.”³⁵ However, this researcher has found no way to show attendance that is unbiased. There will always be some in any survey because the people may not give unbiased answers.

In 2016, R. Powel and R. Pepper in their Australian’s survey, had a pool of 1258 churchgoers that showed how often they attended services. Powell and Pepper discussed how “less than a fifth of Australians [7%] attend religious services at least once a month.”³⁶ This means “47% do not go; 11% go weekly; 8% several times a year; 6% go yearly; [and] 21% [go] less frequency.”³⁷ The variety of answers show that only 11% only go once a week. Alarming, the data shows only a few percent have a weekly commitment to God; however, in this survey, the relational soul caregivers scored Most Important at 90% participation.

Question Eleven: Spiritual Development

How important is your spiritual development in this group?

Spiritual development in community is very important. It is growing to maturity daily learning to think, act, and behave like Jesus. When one is socially interacting with others, it helps bring spiritual development into higher levels for the caregiver. Soul care relationships is caring

³⁴ The Beck Group, “Recent Shifts,” 7.

³⁵ Cynthia Woolever et al., “The Gender Ratio in the Pews: Consequences for Spiritual Vitality,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 27, no. 1 (2007): 27, accessed, December 9, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

³⁶ R. Powel and M. Pepper, “2016 Australian Survey,” last modified 2016, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://ncls.org.au>.

³⁷ Ibid.

for other souls and thinking of their needs. John Fisher argues that everyone has the need for spiritual development, which is vital to maintain a healthy soul:

Consensus is reported in the literature for spirituality being posited at the heart of human experience and it being experienced by everyone. Not only is it believed that ‘each individual has spiritual needs’...human spirituality in a very real sense...unifies the whole person... ‘an inbuilt feature of the human species that develops from the beginning of an individual’s life (or not) depending on... conditions.’ Spirituality can thus be seen as a fundamental, vital component of being human.³⁸

Fisher believes there are four domains for human existence for “the enhancement of spiritual health:” (1) “relation with self in the Personal domain relation with others (2) in the Communal domain relation with the environment (3) in the Environmental domain” and (4) relation with transcendent Other, in the Transcendental domain.”³⁹ Therefore, spiritual development envelops the whole person, as mind, body and soul. If one is not engaged with these domains, the person will not be able to flourish as he or she was created to be.

Question Twelve: Engage with the Bible

How important is it for your group to engage with the Bible and/or devotion?

George Barna did a study on Bible engagement for the American Bible Society in 2014. The study concluded as one ages, he or she increases in studying the Bible since the “Boomers (49-67) and Elders (68 plus)” viewed the Bible as “sacred or holy at 79%” and the largest concentration of Bible readers were in the “south at (63%); northeast (46%); Midwest (53%)” and “west (48%).”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the “average Bible reader spends 30 minutes a day (median)

³⁸ John Fisher, “The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Well-Being,” *Journal of Religion* 2, no. 1 (2011): 18, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰ Barna Group, “American Bible Society, The State of the Bible 2014,” last modified 2014, accessed July 2, 2017, 6, 11, <http://Americanbible.org>.

reading the Bible at each sitting,” and the most popular version is “King James” at 34%; New International at 13%; New King James 10%” and “English Standard Version at 6%.”⁴¹

Barna states in his study for The Barna Group for 2,030 men and women in January and February 2017 that “women are more likely to be Bible friendly (53% verses 47%) and engaged (60% verses 40%)” than men.⁴² The women’s group for the relational soul care questionnaire was five out of ten (50%) believed it was important, but all ten men (100%) believed it was most important. Overall, for scale Somewhat Important numbers four and Most Important number five for both genders, was eighteen out of twenty (90%).

Question Thirteen: Outings for Fellowship

How important is meeting for retreats or outings out of church for continued fellowship (2 or more people)?

The Barna Group did have some data on their program specialties, but the one for outing or retreats scored “31% for evangelicals,” and “practicing Christians were 24%.”⁴³ He states that, usually, there was at least one program in churches of all sizes; however, it has not changed much since “2010 at 38.1% and in 2017 at 38.6%,” so this is not a great priority for the churches.⁴⁴

Women appear to dominate many faith activities. The Barna Group reveals “Attendees of larger churches involve themselves in the broadcast spectrum of faith activities,” and “religious activities are typically missing single adults, especially those who have never been married.”

⁴¹ Barna Group, “American Bible Society,” 12-13.

⁴² Barna, “State of the Bible 2017.”

⁴³ George Barna, “Meet Those Who Love Jesus But Not the Church,” last modified March 2017, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

This seems to be a standard today, but it probably depends on the size of the church and the people involved.

In the researcher's questionnaire, only three women and one man believed it was important, which is four people out of twenty (20%). However, the women's group plan outings several times a year and usually there are several car loads that join in fellowship. There is always an agreement on where the outing is taken. The questionnaire that was taken for community relational soul care was whoever showed up that evening.

Question Fourteen: Emotional Support

How important is it for you to feel you have emotional support from spiritual friends? Jesus shows compassion for many people. When Jesus saw Mary, He showed emotions because He "saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled" (John 11:33).

Neal Krause et al. come from a different angle by saying that gratitude to God helps in ways to stir up emotions that help interpersonal relationships. It is obvious that when one is grateful to God he or she will feel more love to Him and others. They say, "Feelings of gratitude are an essential social lubricant that helps bolster and maintain sound interpersonal relationships in number of ways."⁴⁵ Furthermore, Krause et al. say, "although research is beginning to show that feeling more grateful to God is associated with better physical ...and better psychological well-being... [that] gratitude to God...[is] a positive emotional reaction."⁴⁶ Their research results

⁴⁵ Krause et al., Gratitude to God," 341.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 341-342.

show that the “people who have more friends where they worship...report more emotional support from fellow congregants.”⁴⁷

In the community relational soul care questionnaire, there were nine people out of twenty (45%) who believed that giving each other emotional support was Most Important. The men seemed to value emotional support less than the women, but overall, it was important.

Question Fifteen: Grow in Faith

How important is being in community relational groups to help each other grow in faith emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually?

LifeWay Research from Nashville, Tennessee did a survey about relationships that polled 5,000 Protestant churchgoers. The question was, “I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith.”⁴⁸ The result was “28% said they did, but 43% said they did not.”⁴⁹ This is rather disturbing when another question says, “I have developed significant relationships with my people at my church,” and 68% agreed.⁵⁰ There is something missing. If 68% have significant relationships, what is their spiritual condition if only 28% help others to spiritual growth? Having relationships means people must talk about family, friendships, and trials in life with one another. Christians are called to help each other to spiritual maturity and God calls His children to “carry one another’s burdens” so they can continue to grow (Gal 6:2). So, does this survey reveal superficial relationships? LifeWay Research also seemed concerned with these results.

⁴⁷ Krause et al., *Gratitude to God*, 341.

⁴⁸ LifeWay Research, “Church Relationships are Missing Something,” last modified February 17, 2014, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2014/02/17/research-church-relationships-are-missing-something-canada/>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Question Sixteen: Social Support

How important is having social support, helping others to spiritual vitality?

Kevin D. Dougherty and Andrew L. Whitehead talk about social support and state, “nationally representative samples of U.S. adults, persons in congregations of 2,500 members or more perceived less social support from their fellow congregants than did persons in smaller congregations.”⁵¹ The small groups and smaller churches give more social support for spiritual friends. For the researcher’s questionnaire, all twenty people (100%) believed social support was important for spiritual vitality.

Question Seventeen: Relationships Add to Self-esteem or Identity

How important are spiritual relationships in adding to your self-esteem and/or identity?

Another survey in 2006 that interviewed 309 Protestant churches in the United States revealed that for “greater spiritual vitality...a positive future-focused identity is more highly related to greater community involvement by worshipers.”⁵² This involvement included “growing in faith in their participation in activities of their congregation” and the identity of the direction and mission in community, which identity scored “41%.”⁵³ This was not, however, based upon the personal identity or self-esteem of just an individual, but all members in mission.

Question Eighteen: Experiencing God

How important is experiencing God by engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, devotion, singing, or reading the Bible with others in this group?

⁵¹ Kevin S. Dougherty and Andrew L. Whitehead, “A Place to Belong: Small Group Involvement in Religious Congregations,” *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 94, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41288553>.

⁵² Cynthia Woolever et al., “What Do We Think About Our Future and Does It Matter: Congregational Identity and Vitality,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 27 no. 1 (April 2006): 53, 57-58, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁵³ Ibid.

Experiencing God is the highlight of being a believer, and having eternal life is the ultimate prize. No one cannot know God unless there is a relationship between God and that individual. There are many ways to know God as through His Word, but Blackaby et al. talk about “Experiencing God is not merely reading about His multifaceted character. As you live out your life in faith, you will come to know Him as Healer, Protector, Provider, Comforter, and Savior” and “Your unique life’s experiences will reveal His nature to you in countless personal ways.”⁵⁴

Experiencing God is having a love relationship with the Triune Community. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King have developed seven realities to experience God. If a believer follows this pattern he or she will encounter the living God. There are seven realities:

God is always at work around you (2) God pursues a continuing relationship with you (3) God invites you to become involved with Him in His work (4) God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways (5) God’s invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action (6) You must make adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing (7) You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work in you.⁵⁵

The Lord Jesus Christ pursues a love relationship with His people: God’s children. He is the One who “imitates the invitation for you to be involved with Him in His work,” but He also wants His children to have a “God-centered life.”⁵⁶ To accomplish this, one must continually seek God (God is life), seek to walk in the light (God is light), seek God’s ways (God is life), and deny the flesh to turn away from sin and darkness. When His children seek the kingdom of God, “his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33). The following tables

⁵⁴ Blackaby et al., *NKJV, The Blackaby Study Bible*, 69.

⁵⁵ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2004), 50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

1.13 and 1.14 by Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King are for “self-centered living” verses “God-centered living” for maturity.⁵⁷

Table 1.13 God-centered Living

1.	Confidence in God
2.	Dependence on God and His ability and provision
3.	Life focused on God and His activity
4.	Humbleness before God
5.	Denying self
6.	Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
7.	Seeking God’s perspective in every circumstance
8.	Holy and godly living

Table 1.14 Self-centered Living

1.	Live focused on self
2.	Pride in self and self’s accomplishments
3.	Self-confidence
4.	Depending on self and self’s own abilities
5.	Affirming self
6.	Seeking to be acceptable to the world and its ways

⁵⁷ Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God*, 100-101.

7.	Looking at circumstances from a human perspective
8.	Selfish and ordinary living

Robert Kellerman talks about Jesus and spiritual friendships and says, “How do we know him and make him known... [it is] by knowing one another. The purpose of the church is to be a community of lightbearers who make Jesus known through grace relationships.”⁵⁸ He states further that “God unleashes his power to be like Christ in Christian Community. The ability to know Christ is nourished as we connect to Christ’s children” as told in Ephesians 3:17b-18.⁵⁹ It says in Scripture Ephesians 3:14-19:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

It is important to experience God by whatever spiritual practices one is comfortable with. The Bible says believers need to be “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Eph 5:19). George Barna shows that for personal transformation, there are five activities: “hearing the Word of God; reading the Bible; personal Bible study; Bible memorization, and meditating on the content of God’s Word.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Kellerman, *Spiritual Friends*, 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, 136.

The Barna Group had a survey for the Bible that stated “56%” agreed that the Bible was an “important part of my faith journey.”⁶¹ Also, in another survey of 1,281 Christians in November 2016, Barna asked about spiritual practices and said “83% engaged in prayer, reading of Scripture (56%) and meditation (18%).”⁶² Prayer had a high number at 83%.

For the researcher’s questionnaire, all the men (100%) agreed that experiencing God using spiritual practices were Most Important, and the women had fifty percent; however, five rated it Somewhat Important. Overall, 95 % say experiencing God, the Bible, and other practices were important.

Question Nineteen: Spiritual Gifts

How important do you feel it is to use your spiritual gifts for others?

Greg Ogden believes “Gifts are not for self-advancement but “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7) ... Gifts are community property given to be given away... gifts are for the community.”⁶³ Gifts should be very important to use for others. God gives everyone a special gift (1 Cor 7:7) to use to glorify Him; however, maybe God gives us gifts so believers can give back to Him.

God sent Jesus to His children. When Jesus went away as told in John 16:6, He would send a Helper, the Holy Spirit, is His gift. There is a “simple principle. If you do not walk in the Spirit, you do not have a spiritual gift. Apart from the Spirit, whatever ‘gifts’ we display, can only be our natural talents, drawing attention to our self.”⁶⁴ Romans 12:6 states that gifts are

⁶¹ Barna Group, “State of the Bible 2017.”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 51.

⁶⁴ Henry T. Blackaby and Melvin D. Blackaby, *What’s so Spiritual About Your Gifts* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004), 18.

given according to the proportion to our faith. Every believer is a minister, to use their gifts to help build up one another. For gift of serving, Barna says, “most women who say they are servants that exercise this gift primarily through prayer for others at 46%,” but other gifts are “encouraging others (24%) helping the needy (24%) [and] sharing the gospel (23%).”⁶⁵ God gives gifts to the ones He knows who can do His Will. Some have the gift of teaching, healing, helping or encouragement (1 Cor 12:1-31), to build up and equip the saints (Eph 4:11-13).

Question Twenty: Relationship Develops Spiritual Vitality

How important do you feel it is to the family of God that community relationships add to members’ overall spiritual development (vitality)?

God created His family: they are called the children of God—the saints. They do His work, all for the glory of the Triune community. Relational soul caregivers are believers in community who have a relationship with one another and everyone shares a collective focus that is on Jesus Christ. Also, it is about a believer’s journey to grow to spiritual vitality. It is important to grow together and help one another.

George Barna polled 1, 066 adults in July 2015, asking, “Do you consider yourself spiritual?” and “65%” responded they were, but talking to friends about “spiritual matters” was also “65% for evangelicals and 41% for practicing Christians.”⁶⁶

Another survey for spiritual vitality in community says “Congregations reporting high vitality sponsor more programs for spiritual nurture (62%). In fact, congregations with higher scores on vitality also are more likely to sponsor prayer groups, retreats, and parent/marriage

⁶⁵ George Barna, “Christian Women Today Part 4: What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church,” last modified August 13, 2012, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-women-today-part-1-of-4-what-women-think-of-faith-leadership-and-their-role-in-the-church/>.

⁶⁶ Barna, “Meet Those Who Love Jesus.”

enrichment programs.”⁶⁷ This shows that community is the place to develop spiritual vitality. It should be very important in a believer’s spiritual journey to have overall wholeness. For the researcher survey, 12 believers out of 20 (60%), said it was Most Important.

The final chapter concludes with a summary for this thesis. As a reminder, soul care is not an exact method or formula because no two people are the same in God’s eyes. All people are special to God, as their gifts and their relationship is unique. Therefore, there are essentials in community relational soul care for a transformational approach to help guide believers to spiritual vitality.

⁶⁷ Dudley and Roozen, “A Report on Religion,” 44.

Chapter 4

Research Summary and Conclusion

Research Results

For the purpose and accomplishment of this project, this researcher set out to see if there is a need for spiritual intercession after counseling, for lifelong healing. When the care seeker has biblical counseling, and is released without continued spiritual direction, it can leave a person spiritually unhealthy in many areas of his or her life. This situation has led many people to relapse into old ways of thinking, so either their old behavior remains, or they are broken-hearted and confused while struggling with trials.

This writer knows through years of counseling experience that many people do not get healed from their trials in counseling. Everyone will have trials, but is there help for care seekers after counseling until they flourish in their time? Several things happened, for this writer to conclude that there was such a thing as community relational soul care intervention.

The first opportunity for insight was when tragedy happened at this writer's church, which resulted in both pastors leaving from a split congregation. Some things were resolved, but almost everyone came back and bonded together through spiritual friendships without pastors, although this is not to say pastors are not needed. Secondly, this situation also opened the researcher's eyes to how spiritual fellowship groups help and heal each other. Thirdly, she knew through counseling that most people who still needed help did not fully experience God, and without an encounter with God, no one will ever be healed.

Looking for answers, this researcher used a phenomenological study. The research included a twenty-question Likert scale questionnaire centered on two groups: men and women, both in community fellowship. The questions covered a wide range of relational and spiritual aspects of soul care, besides how believers experienced God, others, and self.

The final research analysis was conducted for a combination of twenty people (10 men and 10 women), who answered twenty questions. The results were that twenty people had circled relational soul care questions on a scale of number three, four and five, from Somewhat Important to Most Important for a combined value of all the questions at 88.75% overall. No one said any of the questions were not important for number one. For number two, (men and women together) only 5% said it was least important and for number five, Most Important was 46.25%.

Question Twenty is also a good example to answer the thesis question, “How important do you feel it is to the family of God that community relationships add to members’ overall spiritual development (vitality)? The data shows out of twenty people 60% said it was Most Important and 40% said it was Somewhat Important. So, therefore, 100% believe it is important that in the family of God community soul care relationships add to spiritual vitality.

The final result is overwhelmingly important at 88.75% that shows community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality. Therefore, according to this survey, and this researcher’s twenty years of experience in counseling and twenty-six years in community relational soul care fellowship, implementing a soul care paradigm for after counseling for continued healing is crucial. Continued counseling in relational soul care in God’s Word and fellowship in groups are critical for spiritual vitality after biblical counseling because the broken spirit still needs time to renew believer’s thoughts to adapt to godly living and dealing with trials.

The following information will be a summary of community relational soul care theological foundation. Furthermore, it highlights part one with the acrostic RELATE with the core essentials and Part Two with the acrostic RESTORE (mentor and Bible study with application). Furthermore, this thesis will include two examples of a factious case study for further understanding.

Soul Care Theological Foundation

The scriptural framework is a relationship that starts with the one true God. It is the core for every believer because God made man in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26) to have a love relationship with Him and others. God Himself is a Triune communal relational being. Since the beginning, mankind has sinned and broken the bonds of relationship. Therefore, the Lord over creation designated a plan for restoring God's people from the beginning, and He sent His Son (Jesus) as a substitute for the sins of mankind. As the result of His death, burial, and resurrection, Incarnational Jesus became the mediator between the Triune community and His children. This union is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Triune relationship is united with mankind again through Jesus Christ, who is the reconciliation by the New Covenant. Jesus is the New Covenant.

There are basics to Jesus' approach in ministry. First, Jesus was social to get people's attention. Second, He was compassionate. Third, He made Himself a servant as He ministered to people's needs. Finally, Jesus showed grace as He forgave sinners. He talked about forgiveness of sin, strengthening faith in working out one's salvation to follow Him, and being disciples for God's mission.

It is God's love that pursues mankind for a relationship. He wants His children to have a vital, whole, joyful, and abundant Christ-centered life. God wants His children's love. When love is restored, God's people will have a new heart and a new spirit that brings them into God's presence that is a face-to-face encounter of the living Spirit of God dwelling within them, which in turn brings spiritual vitality to their lives.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and the second is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39). Loving God, others, and a God-centered self in

community relational soul care is the foundation that is based on this transformational paradigm.

The following table 1.15 includes a biblical model for Matthew 22:37-39 that has been used throughout this thesis to use for developing spiritual vitality. It can be included for extra study for the individual or in the fellowship groups:

Table 1.15 Matthew 22:37-39

<p><u>Love</u>: “love for God is: to keep His commands” (1 John 5:3 HCSB); “love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways (Josh 22:5); and “love the LORD” (Deut 6:5; Mark 12:30, 33; Luke 10:27).</p>
<p><u>Heart</u>: “you will find Him if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 4:29); “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12); “where your treasure is, there your heart will be” (Matt 6:21); “lowly in heart” (Matt 11:29); “one heart” (Acts 4:32); and “Guard your hearts and minds” (Phil 4:7).</p>
<p><u>Soul</u>: “soul rejoices” (Ps 16:29); “reviving the soul” (Ps 19:7); “restores my soul” (Ps 23:3); “soul thirsts for God” (Ps 42:2); “rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29); “save your souls” (Jas 1:21, 5:20); and “cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12, Josh 22:5).</p>
<p><u>Mind</u>: “perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you” (Is 26:3); “serve... God with my mind” (Rom 7:25); “set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6); “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2); “mind of Christ” (2 Cor 2:16); “one Spirit, one mind” (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2); “be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Eph 4:23); “preparing your minds” (1 Pet 1:13); and a mind engaged “with wisdom” (Rev 17:9).</p>
<p><u>Love your neighbor (others)</u>: “love your neighbor” (Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:8-9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8); and “These things I command you, so that you will love one another” (John 15:17; 1 John 4:7, 12).</p>

For application, there are three main sections that run through the Epistles of John. First, a relational God (God is love), relationship with others (God is light), and relation to a God-centered self (God is life). All factors considered, there is God's Word for an awareness of realigning one's life to be transformed into His likeness, developing a love relationship with God and others, fellowship with God and relational soul care fellowship with others, and a love walk developing spiritual vitality for the lifelong journey. Then, mature believers (disciples) are sent out on God's mission as witnesses of the Word to the world to complete the circle of love all over again. True life, light, and love are only found in Jesus Christ. These relational aspects are dimensional in the theological foundation for God and in the understanding of human behavior for others (neighbors).

Part One: Community Relational Soul Care Fellowship RELATE

The first part of this paradigm is designed through the acrostic RELATE. It focuses on spiritual fellowship transformation in restoring God's people to spiritual vitality. David Benner expresses that soul friendships bring their "whole...inner self...[and] seek to safeguard each other's uniqueness and nurture the growth of each other's inner life...on the human journey."¹ Furthermore, Christian spirituality is "working out our existence in the context of the Christian faith and community;" it is a "deep relationship with God that exists when the human spirit is grounded in God's Spirit."²

Part one RELATE: (1) is lived through the Holy Spirit (Godward focus), through others (soul care relationships), and a spiritually healthy God-centered self (outward focus) individually and corporately in community relational soul care. Hirschman said community [Body of Christ]

¹ David Benner, *Scared Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship*, 15.

² Ibid.

is God’s design for His people, who are working out their salvation by “shared relationships lived out in groups of believers whose collective focus is on Christ” and “whose commitment is to each other’s spiritual and emotional welfare enabling spiritual health and vitality in the group as a whole and corporately in the church.”³

RELATE in community fellowships has no exact method or approach because no two people will communicate and fellowship the same way. Each acrostic category is dissected earlier in this thesis for understanding. They are markers for the relational soul care journey and they are needed for healthy vital relationships. Moreover, they intertwine with God, others, and keeping the God-centered self on the right path to maturity. The core essentials for spiritual vitality will align believers in spiritual formation mentality, physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually for the kingdom-minded journey. Table 1.16 reveals the following RELATE with core essentials:

Table 1.16 RELATE with Core Essentials

R elational soul care
E ncouragement for godly living
L ove for one another
A ccountability in community
T ransformation to spiritual vitality
E ssentials for spiritual vitality living in: God’s Word
E ssentials for spiritual vitality living in love

³ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spiritually Fit Life*, 9, 40.

Essentials for spiritual vitality living in worship
Essentials for spiritual vitality living in prayer
Essentials for spiritual vitality living in obedience
Essentials for spiritual vitality living in community life
Essentials for spiritual vitality living in service
Essentials for spiritual vitality living in mission

The overarching goal in the New Covenant for the early church and for all believers today is for Christians to become spiritually mature and vital image-bearers (*Imago Dei*) to be united in love with God and others, sharing fellowship in the Body of Christ in community. Ultimately, it is vital to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). God's people are equipped with the blood of the sent One, Jesus Christ (*Missio Dei*). Since God, is a relational and missionary God, He sent His Son Jesus into the world to redeem His children back to Himself to have a love relationship again, and they are to be missional and kingdom-minded. The overall essentials for spiritual vitality are: inward focus (divine reading of God's Word, love, worship, prayer and obedience), outward focus (community life and service), and Godward focus (God's mission) in community relational soul care.

Example Case Study for Soul Care Fellowship

This example is a women's fellowship group. A believer is placed in a women's soul care fellowship group for gathering once a month. As a reminder, one does not have to have trials to belong to this group. The women range in all ages, but usually they range from 30 years old and upward. They have a business meeting that conducts different projects, snack time that each one takes a turn to bring, and devotion from everyone who takes a turn and Bible study. They sing

songs and work on projects for community and missions service, besides being missional (developing mature disciples). While working on projects, like making blankets, they have conversation with each other. The meeting could involve talking about what they could do to help people by collecting for their food pantry for needy people, making blankets for the homeless, collecting things for infants and unwed mothers, buying or making hats and mittens for children, or similar activities. This woman's group also has functions several times a year that bring in different speakers and they have an Advent desert social, spring luncheon, plan a skit for a fellowship get together, go see musicals, plays, take trips to other functions, tea parties, or go somewhere for many other outings for enjoying spiritual fellowship. They go to assisted-living homes to share the gospel, sing songs to the residents, and take turns visiting individual people there. The gatherings occur in community up to two hours once a month.

In the following case, shows Anna, who is in her fifties, came with her mentor (who is in her sixties) to this woman's group for spiritual friendship. Anna is introduced to the women who are present. The fellowship group opens with prayer and the business meeting is conducted. There is time for devotion, Bible study, and singing a hymn if they desire. One woman in the group suggests they take turns seeing Susan because she is in the nursing home again. She is not doing well. She got very ill after her husband died, and she just gave up. She just does not want to go on without her husband. Her children and grandchildren tried to help her, but she is not responding. The family asked if the women's fellowship group would help. Anna is very quiet because she also lost her husband and is trying to cope with her trials of loneliness and adjustment. Anna's mentor, Marie, says she would go and asked Anna if she would join her. Another lady in the group states she will go the next week, and Samantha said she wants to go with her too.

Samantha knows how this lady feels because she lost her husband five years ago, and it devastated her. They only had each other since their child died. When she joined this group, she kept busy helping in many areas to try to deal with her pain. She told everyone how grateful she was to be in a spiritual fellowship group to help others and to enjoy spiritual friends. Anna, feeling better to talk, says she just lost her husband six months ago, and knows how that lady feels. All the women took turns comforting Anna when the time was right.

Anna is paired up with Samantha to cut out material for blankets for the mission project. Samantha told Anna she is so sorry for her loss. She tells her to call her anytime if there are some rough nights. They talk about each other's stories, laughing, crying, and leaning on each other.

No one ever gets over a loss; however, there must be a time to move forward. Usually, people do not have to set aside time for remembering the person they lost, so when a reminder comes, they can do many things to help them (on earth) to be comforted. They can read their letters, cards, listen to favorite songs that were shared, start a journal that includes what they did that day years prior with their loved one or donate to needy people in the name of the person that passed. Then, they can tuck the memories back away until the next memory moment and move forward with the purpose for their lives. This is a healthy way to live because otherwise, depression can set in. It is not just to move forward, but to have a plan of action to be intentional to live for God, as He has a plan with a "hope and a future" for every life (Jer 29:11).

The time for fellowship of the gathering came to an end. Samantha asks to say the prayer that night. She prays for all people: the congregation, pastor, the ones in need, and the blessing of their spiritual fellowships. She says a special prayer for Susan and Anna, and then everyone says the Lord's Prayer. Since it is Marie's birthday next week, several ladies decided it is a good time

to go to breakfast and plan to meet. Anna decides she will go. This is Anna's first time in a fellowship group and she already seems to feel better.

This summary is a typical gathering for fellowship while doing the Lord's work. The relational soul caregivers talk, cry, pray, praise God, and laugh together. It is all part of doing God's work and helping each other cope with life's trials. For Anna, healing will take time, but this fellowship group will help her heal, and she will be busy helping other people. Anna's life will never be the same since her husband has passed. She must find a new normal, a different way to cope and function. She will never get over her loss, but she can find a way to deal with it, with her spiritual companions.

The second part of community relational soul care paradigm is from the acrostic RESTORE. Anna's mentor, Marie, planned a meeting at the end of the week for Bible study in the Epistles of John. They met for a few minutes before and signed a confidentially form so Anna would know whatever she told Marie was in confidence.

Part Two: Community Relational Soul Care Biblical Manual RESTORE

The approach is solidified through a mentor with Bible soul care study and community relational soul care fellowship. The mentor sessions are only for a period of time for Bible study and application for collaborative solutions; however, relational soul care in community is a lifetime for sacred companions.

Part two from the acrostic RESTORE, is an individual Bible study in the Epistles of John with soul care relationships for restoring God's children to spiritual vitality. This will give a foundation of Scripture, a hermeneutical understanding, and an application for (inward focus) growing to maturity for the care seeker.

It is important to discuss four principles this writer adapted from attachment theory, as (1) providing secure relationships for mentor and community of believers for direction and fellowship, (2) being able to explore the world in relationships, but through God's eyes, (3) combatting the threat by sin/temptation while meeting the need to restore behaviors with God and fellowship with soul caregivers, and (4) learning to develop intimate relationships with God and others while feeling safe within the boundaries of the Christian circle of attachments. God attachment is about intimacy with God and living, loving, and shepherding each other in the circle of attachments in community. God attachment is a Triune relational bond that leads His children to righteousness for eternal life.

Henry Blackaby and Claude V. King wrote a book that is essential for every believer called *Experiencing God*. It is a beneficial supplement to the Bible and a good commentary in the care seeker's homework study. Blackaby and King walk readers through a variety of believers' questions, how to experience God and how to know Him, starting with an intimate love relationship with God. Here is only a taste of their work, as they discuss the seven realities about encountering God:

God is always at work around you (2) God pursues a continuing relationship with you (3) God invites you to become involved with Him in His work (4) God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways (5) God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action (6) You must make adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing (7) You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work in you.⁴

To discuss Bible study, a believer needs to know that God's Word is perfect (Ps 18:30), pure (Ps 119:140), and provides protection (Ps 30:5) for those who love Him (2 Sam 22:31).

⁴ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2004), 50.

When a believer is in a “personal relationship with God...it is a living ongoing relationship of love!”⁵ God’s Word is Spirit-breathed as told in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Also, the “Holy Spirit uses the Word of God like a sword as told in Ephesians 6:17, “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” to “convict you of sin...all truth...all things” for “remembrance all that Christ” told His believers for His “will and call on your life (John 14:26; 16: 7-15).”⁶

Prayer is essential for a believer, and as a reminder, Henri Nouwen discovered Jesus’ ministry and believed there are “three disciplines we are called to practice on the long journey home” as “(solitude) prayer at night, (formed His) community in the morning and ministry in the afternoon [healing people].”⁷ Jesus went about His ministry with “power, love, and discipline,” as it states in Scripture, “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.”⁸ Ministering like Jesus did, is an example for His believers to follow. However, to follow Jesus, He wants every believer to be spiritually healthy. Greg Ogden says it is the “primary goal of the Christian life is to reach the state of maturity in Christ.”⁹

The mentor is a spiritual guide to vitality. Greg Ogden states that a definition for a helper is a disciple who is in an “intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another to grow toward maturity in Christ.”¹⁰ It

⁵ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Called and Accountable*, 181.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 110,

⁸ I Timothy 1:7, New American Standard Bible. (Glassport, PA: Biblehub.com, 2016).

⁹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 101.

¹⁰ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 17.

should be noted that the mentor should meet with the pastor/spiritual leader monthly to also be mentored for appropriate direction for the care seeker.

The suggested timeframe is as follows: each meeting should not exceed 90 minutes and one meeting each month for seven months (this can be adapted). Each meeting offers approximately 30 minutes for the care seeker telling their story (first meeting), and after this the mentor and care seeker will go over the RELATE acrostic and core essentials. The core essentials are for living in spiritual vitality for added study for understanding: (1) God's Word (2) love (3) worship (4) prayer (5) [obedience] (6) community (7) service and (8) evangelism.¹¹ Then, they will have 30 minutes of Bible study in Epistles of John (one chapter per month; God's story) and 30 minutes of reflection for alignment and restoration to live Godward in discipleship, experiencing spiritual vitality. The two-part paradigm is in conjunction with the mentor and community of believers in the same time frame. This means that the mentor and care seeker meets monthly for 90 minutes and the fellowship group (mission focused) meets monthly for 120 minutes (approximately).

There are three essential themes (the three W's) considered for continued soul care in the Epistles of John: God is Life (Word), God is Light (God's wisdom/Christians walk with wisdom), and God is Love (worship). The acrostic word RESTORE is woven throughout the study of the three Epistles of John. The foundational study in God's Word will help a care seeker grow to spiritual vitality through the lens of God's love for mankind. The following table 1.17 is a RESTORE acrostic for spiritual vitality:

Table 1.17 RESTORE Spiritual Vitality

Relationship/fellowship with God and others (besides mentor and community)

¹¹ Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 9.

Engage in retelling care seekers story; collaborative communication
Soul searching solutions; Spirit of truth; Scripture
Transformation lived out Godward for Spiritual vitality
Others; reaching outward in love, discipleship, God's mission, walking in Light
Restoration (plan of action)
Establish alignment with God; consistent obedience to God and prayer

For Spiritual vitality, the overarching goal is to RESTORE believers back to God, loving others, and continually developing a God-centered self. Jesus' words speak to the heart of the matter as He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). His truth is His Word, and without knowing His Word, there is no way have a relationship with Him. RESTORE is a process throughout the seven months that after which the care seeker would continue in community fellowships for developing maturity.

Example Case Study for Care Seeker's Bible Study with Application

Anna begins to get settled with her Bible and a commentary. The mentor begins with prayer. She asks Anna if there is anything she wants to talk about and to tell her why she wanted to come here. Anna tells her story. The mentor should let Anna talk about whatever she feels comfortable with. In appropriate places, the mentor could make comments or ask questions. The mentor should always be mindful of body language so that the care seeker will not misunderstand anything conveyed by the mentor. Also, she should be observing of the time, but be careful not to cut off the care seeker when she is telling her story. This would be the first meeting, but after this for added study go to the essentials of spiritual vitality for living in (1) God's Word (2) love (3) worship (4) prayer (5) [obedience] (6) community (7) service and (8)

evangelism.¹² Finally, at the end of the meetings, the mentor should let the person talk about what she learned in God's Word. Especially, if she learned to cope with problems, and how she plans to take actions for her behavior, character, and insights she gained, or what she can do to love God and others.

For Bible study, in the First Epistle of John (go back and read the introduction and everything that is stated). The mentor should have the care seeker read 1 John 1:1-4:

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life. 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us. 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

The mentor should talk about everything that is stated in 1 John 1:1-4 and read the commentary with it so the person will understand more. Then, for the last 30 minutes, the mentor should talk about the spiritual reflection using the living in truth application. Throughout the meetings or home study, the mentor and care seeker should discuss the seven realities of God and the God-centered living chart verses self-centered living chart taken from Henry Blackaby and Claude V. King's book *Experiencing God*.¹³ Also, the care seeker should read the Psalms at home for laments. Prayer concludes the Bible study meeting and reflection. Furthermore, it is important for the analysis for spiritual growth to go over the questions in Genesis Three-Question Model for Spiritual Vitality.

On eagle's wings: this is how the great Most High God carries His children's burdens. He carries them on eagle's wings so they can have an intimate love relationship with Him. Believers

¹² Hirschman, *Essentials for a Spirituality Fit Life*, 9.

¹³ Blackaby and King, *Experiencing God*.

have been restored to have freedom to worship the Triune community; to bring them back to Himself (2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:20). God speaks in Exodus 19:4b-6: “I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples” and He states, “for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Community soul care relationships are a gift God gave to the Body of Christ for believers to help one another on their lifelong journey. Trials come, but God is there, and He works through spiritual friends. As ministers of a New Covenant, soul caregivers are walking letters “read by all” because God’s love is carved on their hearts by the “Spirit of the living God” who “gives life” (2 Cor 3:2-6). God’s living Spirit is continually, actively moving and living in the heart of His believers to move His children to spiritual vitality!

Finally, Matthew 22:37-39 states, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” as well as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Adding on the holy discipline of God-centered living as a child of God, they will complete the circle of God’s commands living Godward in spiritual vitality.

For this thesis, *Community Relational Soul Care: A Transformational Paradigm for Restoring God’s People to Spiritual Vitality*, the researcher set out to answer the question of whether community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality. The answer for all the survey questions is important and the result was an overwhelming 88.75% who agreed that it did.

Also, the thesis question number twenty shows 60% that community relational soul care was Most Important and 40% said it was Somewhat Important. Together, 100% believed it was important for the family of God that soul care relationships added to spiritual vitality. Therefore,

it would be crucial to implement a transformational paradigm to help care seekers after counseling for continued soul care so that God's children could flourish in their time.

So, for this project, the spiritual layers unfolded researched information, performed a methodical study for community relational soul caregivers, and balanced it in God's Word in the Epistles of John. Throughout this paradigm, the researcher discovered the factors for restoration in spiritual areas of relational soul care and development for spiritual vitality in relationships with God, others, and God-centered self in community relational soul care.

APPENDIX A

Community Relational Soul Care Questionnaire

Please circle ONLY one single number for each question below:

1. Circle the highest priority in your life right now?

1. Career
2. Education
3. Health
4. Family
5. God

2. In your women's/men's group (circle gender), whether designed for fellowship, evangelism and/or organizational duties, how important as image bearers of the Triune God, who rely on the Holy Spirit, is the aim to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

3. Is shepherding each other important for serving in community relational soul care (needs for one another)?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

4. How important is doing God's work for the kingdom; to build up, encourage one another, all for strengthening the body of Christ for God's mission?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

5. How important is soul care (needs) for others, especially widows, orphans, and children?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

6. How important is intentionally setting aside your time to help needy people?

Not important		Somewhat Important		Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

7. What scale of importance does spiritual vitality (overall spiritual health: God, others, and God-centered self), have to do with community relationships?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

8. How important is feeling spiritually rejuvenated after a meeting, having shared time with your spiritual friends?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

9. How important is it to express your ideas or concerns for others in this group?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

10. How important to you is regularly attending church?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

11. How important is your spiritual development in this group?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

12. How important is it for your group to engage with the Bible and/or devotion?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

13. How important is meeting for retreats or outings out of church for continued fellowship (2 or more people)?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

14. How important is it for you to feel you have emotional support from spiritual friends?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

15. How important is being in community relational groups to help each other grow in faith emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

16. How important is having social support, helping others to spiritual vitality?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

17. How important are spiritual relationships in adding to your self-esteem and/or identity?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

18. How important is experiencing God by engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, devotion, singing, or reading the Bible with others in this group?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

19. How important do you feel it is to use your spiritual gifts for others?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

20. How important do you feel it is to the family of God that community relationships add to members' overall spiritual development (vitality)?

Not important	Somewhat Important			Most Important
1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

Community Relational Soul Care: A Transformational Paradigm for Restoring God's people to Spiritual Vitality

Julie A. Larsen

Chapter One: Introduction

- ▶ **Community relational soul care has multidimensional spiritual layers that beg for all of God's children to experience God's presence and spiritual fellowship (1 John 1:3). There were barriers to experience God's holy presence; consequently, God's children needed to be restored back to the Father. Scripture shows that Jesus was the sent One. His mission was coming in the flesh and suffering from His death, burial, and resurrection for all sin of mankind. Yet, when Jesus left this earthly kingdom, He did not leave His children as orphans (John 14:18) because He sent His Helper, the Advocate, who is the Holy Spirit, to have a Triune relationship with God's people. This project enfolds the transformational paradigm of Jesus Christ's life, light, and love that is highlighted through the Epistles of John for believers illuminating God's people for restoration so they will experience spiritual vitality in community.**

Chapter One Continued

- ▶ *Community Relational Soul Care: A Transformational Paradigm for Restoring God's People to Spiritual Vitality*, focuses on the need for a relational soul care paradigm within the faith community that is essential for lifelong healing. This relational paradigm accomplishes what God originally wanted for His people; to be restored back to Himself. God wanted His children to experience spiritual transformation for their lifelong journey and to live in eternity with the Triune God all for His glory.
- ▶ It is problematic after counseling that people still need continued soul care. For spiritual vitality, it is critical for spiritual guidance after biblical counseling because the broken spirit still needs time to renew their thoughts to adapt to a new normal for ways of godly living. When the needy person has biblical counseling and then released without spiritual direction from a soul care mentor and relational soul caregivers for an adjustment time, it can leave a person spiritually unhealthy or unwholesome in many areas of life. This situation has led many people to relapse into old ways of thinking so ultimately their old behavior remains, or they are broken-hearted and confused struggling with trials. In this mindset, they often feel rejected and sometime blame God and community.

Chapter One Continued

- ▶ The three-phase approach integrates a biblically trained soul care mentor for direction and accountability, care-seeker who needs spiritual guidance after counseling, and both will also engage in community relational soul care fellowship to develop spiritual vitality; who are all under the umbrella of influence of the Holy Spirit. This ministry project will focus on the mentor's approach using the three Epistles of John for individual focus along with relational soul caregivers who love, learn, listen, and shepherd each other, being emissaries of hope on God's mission. They will be illuminating the path from the Holy Spirit as guardians of the power of the throne of God. The person of the Holy Spirit is the resurrection power that transforms one's life to want to seek and live a healthy vital life. This three-way relationship is intimately connected helping one another to cross through the trials of life experiencing transformation from the Holy Spirit who paved the way with love and grace.

Chapter One Continued

- ▶ Scripture is foundational for direct relationship to the researcher's topic. It is imperative to revisit history, going back in the Old Testament for spiritual soul care relationships (1 Sam 3:9; 2 Sam 12:7). Relationships are the core for every believer because God made man in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26) to have a love relationship with Him and others. God Himself is a Triune, communal, and relational being. However, problems elevated with the fall of man, as there was no way to get back to the LORD. Therefore, the LORD over creation designated a plan for restoring His people from the beginning, who sent His Son as a substitute for the sins of mankind.
- ▶ The overarching goal in the New Covenant for the early church and for all believers today is that all Christians are to become spiritually mature vital image-bearers (*Imago Dei*), to be united in love with God and others, sharing fellowship in the Body of Christ in community. Ultimately, it is vital to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). God's people are equipped with the blood of the sent One, Jesus Christ (*Missio Dei*). Since God is a relational and missionary God, He sent His Son Jesus into the world to redeem His children back to Himself to have a love relationship again and they are to be missional and kingdom-minded. This is God's love story, now His peoples love story for one another.

Chapter One Continued

- ▶ Chapter one explains the basic theological foundation and why there is a need to facilitate a paradigm for after counseling. It is a format based on two overall essentials for spiritual vitality. The first part (loving God), is the foundation for Jesus' church, and the second (loving others), is doing life together in community (Matt 22:37-39), as God had planned. As believers of Jesus Christ, if you do not engage in the Body of Christ (community) you cannot obey the commandments of Scripture (e. g. love one another).

Chapter One Continued

- ▶ The two essentials are based on three objectives for believers:
 - (1) Relational God (intimate and deep communion in a love relationship with God): God is love (1 John 4:8); Word, love, and worship
 - (2) Relationship with others (life together in community and others): God is light (1 John 1:5); community, service and mission.
 - (3) Relation to a God-centered self (in an awareness of realigning believers lives to be transformed into His likeness, developing spiritual vitality for the journey, who are sent out on God's mission as witnesses of the Word to the world): God is life (1 John 5:12, 20); prayer and obedience.

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Chapter two gives research data to develop spiritual vitality from academic scholars. Also, it explains the paradigm in two parts. Part one from the acrostic RELATE, includes a foundation for community relational soul caregivers (fellowship groups). Furthermore, it includes the eight core essentials for spiritual vitality. The eight essentials are adapted and redesigned from Hirschman's seven spiritually fit model (Hirschman 2015, 9). It is an inward focus: reading of God's Word, love (God's love, love for God, and others), worship, prayer and obedience; outward focus: community life and service; besides Godward focus: being sent out as God's mission in the world.

Chapter Two Continued

► Part One the acrostic RELATE:

Relational soul care

Encouragement for godly living

Love for one another

Accountability in community

Transformation to spiritual vitality

Essentials for spiritual vitality: living in God's Word, love, worship, prayer, obedience, community life, service, and mission.

Chapter Two Continued

- Part two from the acrostic RESTORE, is an individual Bible study in the Epistles of John with application of soul care relationships for restoring God's children to spiritual vitality. This will give a foundation of Scripture, a hermeneutical understanding and application for (inward focus) growing to maturity for the care seeker. There are three essential themes (three W's) considered for continued soul care in the Epistles of John: God is Life (Word), God is Light (God's wisdom/Christians walk with wisdom), and God is Love (worship).

Chapter Two Continued

► The acrostic RESTORE:

Relationship/fellowship with God and others (besides mentor and community)

Engage in retelling care seekers story (looking back); collaborative communication

Soul searching solutions (present); Spirit of truth; Scripture

Transformation (moving forward) lived out Godward to Spiritual vitality

Others; reaching outward in love, discipleship, God's mission, walking in Light

Restoration (plan of action for lifelong journey)

Establish alignment with God; consistent obedience to God; and for others in prayer.

Chapter Two (examples of academic scholars) Continued

► Three disciplines of spiritual direction from Henri Nouwen:

(1) The heart: Prayer

(2) The Book; *Lectio Divina*, (sacred reading of God's Word),

(3) The discipline of community [relationship with God and people of God] (Nouwen 2006, xviii).

► David Hirschman wrote about his seven basic *Essentials for a Spiritually Fit Life*, in three-parts:

(1) Upward essentials; love (for God, others, and neighbors) and worship

(2) Inward essentials; prayer and God's Word

(3) Outward essentials; community, service, and evangelism (Hirschman 2015, 9).

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Praying, moves a person in the presence of God, face-to-face. It is the throne of grace that is most holy. When prayer is “practiced in an environment of spiritual friendships,” it “can bring growth and fruitfulness back to our Christian lives,” therefore, “grace, love and fellowship” are the beating of the heart of God for prayer, in community (Houston 2007, 289).
- ▶ Hirschman’s pattern for the Lord’s Prayer:
 - Relationship: *“Father, which art in heaven”*
 - Worship: *“Hallowed be thy name”*
 - Priority: *“Thy kingdom come”* (God’s plan first)
 - Acceptance: *“Thy will be done”* (of the will of God)
 - Requests: *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (daily needs)
 - Admission/Confession: *“Forgive us our debts”* (of sin)
 - Submission: *“And lead us not”* (to God’s leading)
 - Closing: *“For thine is the kingdom”* (focus on God), (Hirschman 2015, 29)

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Everett L. Worthington and Michael Scherer talk about four principles for negative health outcomes when people do not forgive one another.
 - (1) Unforgiveness is stressful
 - (2) Coping mechanisms...can reduce unforgiveness
 - (3) Forgiveness reduces the stress of unforgiveness
 - (4) Forgiveness as a coping strategy is related to health (Worthington and Scherer 2004, 388).
- ▶ Worthington talks about two types of forgiveness for spiritual maturity:
 - (1) Decisional forgiveness (making a decision not to seek revenge)
 - (2) Emotional forgiveness (change of heart replacing negative with positive emotions), (Worthington 2005, 121-125).

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Worthington has an acrostic for forgiveness called REACH:
 - Recall the hurt
 - Empathize the transgressor
 - Altruistic gift of forgiveness
 - Commit publicly to the forgiveness one experiences
 - Hold on to forgiveness (Worthington Jr., 2005, 126-130).

- ▶ Henri Nouwen discovered Jesus' ministry and believed there are "three disciplines we are called to practice on the long journey home," as Jesus:
 - (1) (Formed His) community in the morning
 - (2) Ministry in the afternoon [healing people]
 - (3) (Solitude) prayer at night (Nouwen 2006, 110).

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Klaus Issler identified six formational themes from Jesus' ministry from the Sermon on the Mount for Christian maturity:
 - (1) Seeking/loving/depending on God above all
 - (2) Relational attachment as Jesus' church
 - (3) Missional participation
 - (4) Scriptural saturation
 - (5) Inner heart formation
 - (6) Two kingdoms discernment (Klaus 2010, 381).

- ▶ Klaus Issler also says there are at least three practices that Jesus taught as an example: "(1) to help us grow toward greater family unity (2) forgiving one another; [and] (3) peacemaking in conflict and developing closer friendships as part of building community" (Klaus 2012, 164).

Chapter Two Continued

- ▶ Joshua Knabb and Matthew Emerson discuss attachment theories as there are four basic attachment principles: “(1) secure base (2) exploration (3) attachment behaviors [and] (4) safe haven” (Knabb and Emerson 2013, 828). This writer redesigned the following attachment principles for community relational soul care:
- ▶ (1) Secure relationships for mentor and community of soul care givers for direction and fellowship.
- ▶ (2) Being able to explore the world in relationships, but through God’s eyes.
- ▶ (3) Warning of sin/temptation, need to restore right behaviors with God and others.
- ▶ (4) Learn to develop intimate relationships with God and others, feeling safe within the boundaries of the Christian circle of attachments (Christian family and community).

Chapter Two Continued

Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King developed characteristics for God-centered living:

- ▶ Confidence in God
- ▶ Dependence on God and His ability and provision
- ▶ Life focused on God and His activity
- ▶ Humbleness before God
- ▶ Denying self
- ▶ Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
- ▶ Seeking God’s perspective in every circumstance
- ▶ Holy and godly living (Blackaby and King 2004, 100-101).

Chapter Two Continued

- Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King developed seven realities to experience God. Experiencing God is having a love relationship with the Triune Community:

- (1) God is always at work around you.
- (2) God pursues a continuing relationship with you.
- (3) God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
- (4) God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
- (5) God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
- (6) You must make adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
- (7) You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work in you (Blackaby and King 2004, 50).

Chapter Two Continued

- Kenneth Boa lists ten ways for living life in community:

- (1) Relational enrichment and commitment
- (2) Trust, love and acceptance
- (3) Mutual submission out of reverence for Christ
- (4) Encouragement and accountability
- (5) Forgiveness and reciprocal confession under the cross
- (6) Physical, psychological, and spiritual healing
- (7) Nourishment in the life of Scripture, meditation, and prayer
- (8) Participation in a corporate calling and purpose
- (9) Love for neighbor as an essential expression of the spiritual life
- (10) Ministry and service (Boa 2001, 419).

1. Biblical Model: Genesis Three-Question Model for Spiritual Vitality

For the Genesis model, this writer adapted and redesigned the answers from the questions from God. It is for believers to ask themselves how to walk in truth and be obedient to God so they can live in spiritual vitality. These questions were originally discussed for the marriage couple (Mikkelsen 2016).

(1) Genesis Question: “Where are you” (Gen 3:9)?

A person could examine his or her life as where they are in their spiritual journey? Are they distressed, stressed, have anxiety, living in sin, not following God’s ways, and/or not doing what one is supposed to do for God, others, self or family?

(2) Genesis Question: “Who told you that you were naked” (Gen 3:11)?

Who are the people the believers are listening to? As sheep, do God’s children know their master’s voice? Are they listening to God’s Word? Adam and Eve did not; they sinned and listened to the evil one that drew them away from God. Are there conflicts within themselves because they do not have a love relationship with God? Who and what are they listening to because they do not think they measure up to others?

(3) Genesis Question: “What is this that you have done” (Gen 3:13)?

Adam and Eve did wrong and sinned. People are to recognize what they are doing in their life as choices and decisions that will impact them and others. Do not listen to the voices of false teachers and be accountable for one’s actions. Recognize how one got to the point he or she is at and set out for living a life to spiritual vitality.

2. Biblical Model: Matthew 22:37-39

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- ▶ **Love:** “love for God is: to keep His commands” (1 John 5:3 HCSB); “love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways (Josh 22:5); and “love the LORD” (Deut 6:5; Mark 12:30, 33; Luke 10:27).
- ▶ **Heart:** “you will find Him if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 4:29); “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12); “where your treasure is, there your heart will be” (Matt 6:21); “lowly in heart” (Matt 11:29); “one heart” (Acts 4:32); and “Guard your hearts and minds” (Phil 4:7).
- ▶ **Soul:** “soul rejoices” (Ps 16:29); “reviving the soul” (Ps 19:7); “restores my soul” (Ps 23:3); “soul thirsts for God” (Ps 42:2); “rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29); “save your souls” (Jas 1:21, 5:20); and “cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12, Josh 22:5).
- ▶ **Mind:** “perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you” (Is 26:3); “serve... God with my mind” (Rom 7:25); “set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6); “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2); “mind of Christ” (2 Cor 2:16); “one Spirit, one mind” (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2); “be renewed in the spirit of your minds” (Eph 4:23); “preparing your minds” (1 Peter 1:13); and a mind engaged “with wisdom” (Rev 17:9).
- ▶ **Love your neighbor (others):** “love your neighbor” (Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:8-9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8); and “These things I command you, so that you will love one another” (John 15:17; 1 John 4:7, 12).

3. Biblical Model Seven-fold Spirit of the Lord:

Isaiah 11:2, "And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." Seek the Spirit of the living Lord for developing spiritual maturity:

- ▶ Spirit of the Lord: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18; 2 Cor 3:17); rely on Holy Spirit for power and guidance in direction and decisions (Mark 1:2); "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power" (Eph 6:10); and "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7).
- ▶ Spirit of wisdom: discernment (Prov 17:24); God's wisdom "Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24); "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30); and "God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph 1:17).
- ▶ Spirit of understanding: Spirit will reveal understandings of God (1 Cor 2:10) and discernment for others (Prov 8:9; 14:6).
- ▶ Spirit of counsel: "comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31); "encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy" (Phil 2:1); and "comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:4).
- ▶ Spirit of might: "I love you, O LORD, my strength" (Ps 18:1); "O my Strength, I will sing praises to you" (Ps 59:17); "The LORD is my strength and my shield" (Ps 28:7); and "LORD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation" (Exod 15:2).
- ▶ Spirit of knowledge: Spirit reveals knowledge of God's Will; and Spirit of understanding seeks knowledge (Prov 15:14; Dan 2:21).
- ▶ Spirit of the fear of the Lord: "You shall fear [revere] the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear" (Deut 10:20).

Chapter Three Research

- ▶ The phenomenological study is foundational for the instrument tool, which is the Likert Scale twenty-question questionnaire that was used to determine how community relational soul caregivers respond to questions to determine spiritual vitality in relationships with God, others and self. It shows the results from the data that was collected from the experiment using a phenomenological study.
- ▶ The first part of the research method was focused on two sets of participants who are in community fellowship groups: 10 men and 10 women.
- ▶ The main question was stated for this thesis, does community relational soul care transform Christians to spiritual vitality?
- ▶ The following questions 1-20, will have results from twenty believers in relational soul care groups that will only include Somewhat Important on a scale of numbers 3 and 4, including number 5 as Most Important.
- ▶ Part two of the research questions will also have an analysis from different research groups to help understand results from around the world, if there was an analysis for the similar question. However, results emphasized in this PowerPoint will only include the following for the twenty people surveyed.

Chapter Four: Questionnaire Summary and Analysis

The results: twenty people circled their answers on a scale of numbers three and four of Somewhat Important and number five Most Important for soul care relational questions as the combined value for all data on the questionnaire rated 88.75% overall. For the thesis question number twenty, 60% said it was Most Important that relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality. Also, they stated it was 100% overall important.

Furthermore, on the scale number two for men and women together, only 5% said it was least important and for scale number five for Most Important was 46.25%. No one said it was not important for scale number one.

Chapter Three and Four Research, Analysis and Summary

- ▶ Question One: Circle the highest priority in your life right now.

Results: 90% chose God; 5% chose family; 5% chose health.

- ▶ Question Two: In your women's/men's group (circle gender), whether designed for fellowship, evangelism and/or organizational duties, how important as image bearers of the Triune God, who rely on the Holy Spirit, is the aim to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by developing closer relationships with God and one another?

Results: 85% chose most important; 15% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Three: Is shepherding each other important for serving in community relational soul care (needs for one another)?

Results: 40% chose most important; 55% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Four: How important is doing God's work for the kingdom; to build up, encourage one another, all for strengthening the body of Christ for God's mission?

Results: 85% chose most important; 15% chose somewhat important.

Chapter Three and Four

Research, Analysis and Summary Continued

- ▶ **Question Five:** How important is soul care (needs) for others, especially widows, orphans, and children?

Results: 45% chose most important; 50% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Six:** How important is intentionally setting aside your time to help needy people?

Results: 20% chose most important; 75% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Seven:** What scale of importance does spiritual vitality (overall spiritual health: God, others, and God-centered self), have to do with community relationships?

Results: 60% chose most important; 40% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Eight:** How important is feeling spiritually rejuvenated after a meeting, having shared time with your spiritual friends?

Results: 35% chose most important; 40% chose somewhat important.

Chapter Three and Four

Research, Analysis and Summary Continued

- ▶ **Question Nine:** How important is it to express your ideas or concerns for others in this group?

Results: 40% chose most important; 55% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Ten:** How important to you is regularly attending church?

Results: 90% chose most important; 10% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Eleven:** How important is your spiritual development in this group?

Results: 25% chose most important; 75% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Twelve:** How important is it for your group to engage with the Bible and/or devotion?

Results: 75% chose most important; 25% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ **Question Thirteen:** How important is meeting for retreats or outings out of church for continued fellowship (2 or more people)?

Results: 20% chose most important; 45% chose somewhat important.

Chapter Three and Four

Research, Analysis and Summary Continued

- ▶ Question Fourteen: How important is it for you to feel you have emotional support from spiritual friends?

Results: 45% chose most important; 55% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Fifteen: How important is being in community relational groups to help each other grow in faith emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually?

Results: 50% chose most important; 50% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Sixteen: How important is having social support, helping others to spiritual vitality?

Results: 35% chose most important; 65% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Seventeen: How important are spiritual relationships in adding to your self-esteem and/or identity?

Results: 35% chose most important; 45% chose somewhat important.

Chapter Three and Four

Research, Analysis and Summary Continued

- ▶ Question Eighteen: How important is experiencing God by engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, devotion, singing, or reading the Bible with others in this group?

Results: 75% chose most important; 25% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Nineteen: How important do you feel it is to use your spiritual gifts for others?

Results: 30% chose most important; 70% chose somewhat important.

- ▶ Question Twenty: How important do you feel it is to the family of God that community relationships add to members' overall spiritual development (vitality)?

✓ Results: 60% chose most important; 40% chose somewhat important.

- ✓ The importance of this question answers the question for this thesis, as 100% believed it is important that community relationships add to spiritual vitality.

Chapter Four: Summary and Analysis Continued

Does community relational soul care transform Christian's to spiritual vitality?

The answer, out of the twenty people surveyed that answered question twenty, an overwhelming 100% believed it was important that community relational soul care transforms Christians to spiritual vitality.

- ▶ Therefore, according to this survey, and with twenty years of evaluated experience in counseling and over twenty years in community relational soul care fellowship in this church (not counting others), this means it would be important to implement a soul care paradigm after counseling for continued healing to maturity.
- ▶ This research shows it is critical for guidance from a trained mentor for Bible study and relational soul caregivers after biblical counseling because the broken spirit still needs time to renew their thoughts to adapt to a new normal for ways of godly living and dealing with trials.
- ▶ Soul care relationships are important whether one needs continued soul care or not, according to the questions posited.

Conclusion

- ▶ On Eagle's Wings, this is how the great Most High God carries His children's burdens; so, they can have an intimate love relationship with Him. Believers have been restored to have freedom to worship the Triune community; to bring them back to Himself (2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:20). Also, they are to love God (first commandment) and (second commandment) love others (Matt 22:37-39), besides live to love, worship and serve God: in obedience, in prayer, in His Word, in community, for His mission.
- ▶ God is speaking in Exodus 19:4b-6, "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..." (ESV).

Conclusion Continued

- ▶ Experiencing God is first and foremost for an intimate love relationship but God uses circumstances, people, assignments, and their calling to bring believers in deep communion with Him. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, enables believers to be God-empowered to be a light in this dark world. God gave Himself to believers with a community of relationships to complete His missional task, redemption to the lost. Furthermore, all believers are called to equip and guide others to spiritual vitality. Christians are His servants to help guide others to Jesus so He can heal them. Without an encounter with God: in His presence, face-to-face, and heart to heart, there will be no spiritual vitality.
- ▶ Community soul care relationships are a gift God gives to the Body of Christ to help one another on their lifelong journey. Trials come but God is there and He works through spiritual friends. As it says, “Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, LORD, do I seek’” (Ps 27:7-8). He will hear His children, because He already knows what they need; just “seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Lk 12:31). Soul care givers are ministers of a New Covenant, they are walking letters “read by all,” because God’s love is carved on their hearts by the “Spirit of the living God” who “gives life” (2 Cor 3:2-6). This living Spirit continually develops His children to spiritual vitality!

Conclusion continued

- ▶ Community relational soul caregivers are the fragrance of God (2 Cor 2:14-15) for wisdom and knowledge every where they walk to help and love one another to spiritual vitality. The fragrance of Christ permeate believers lives to show others how to have a victorious life over sin and over all other troubled areas in life. Relational soul caregivers become the sweet smelling aroma of love others will variously be affected by it and seek after so people can be healed and develop spiritual vitality.

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 13, 2017

Julie Larsen

IRB Exemption 2894.061317: Community Relational Soul Care: A Transformational Paradigm for Restoring God's People to Spiritual Vitality

Dear Julie Larsen,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
 The Graduate School

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