

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Sharing the Lord's Supper:
Finding Fellowship and Love in a Sacramental, Communal Meal**

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This thesis project identifies the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in conjunction with a communal meal. At this project's Ministry Context, Garden City Bible Fellowship, there is a lack of fellowship and love. This project investigates whether the implementation of the Lord's Supper and a communal meal on a weekly basis will build fellowship and love in a biblical way. After being approved by the leadership of this church, the topic will be introduced to the congregation via a sermon on the subject, culminating in a question and answer session for anyone who has questions before participating. Research will begin by participants voluntarily and anonymously completing an introductory survey, which will reveal their current views on the Lord's Supper and the love feast. These participants will then voluntarily participate in the Lord's Supper and the communal meal weekly for the next five weeks. Subsequently, those who have participated in three or more communal meals will complete the conclusory survey, which will be compared with the introductory survey to discover themes or slippages.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Every local church is unique and yet similar to all other local churches. Consequently, every local church will have its own unique context and problems, but it will never be alone in its context and problems. However, before any church can solve its problems, it must perceive its own context and know itself, so that it might diagnose itself. In this case, the local church context is Garden City Bible Fellowship, located in Roanoke, Virginia, where traditions have arisen that have caused a lack of real, biblical fellowship and love among its members. The members are divided primarily by age and length of time attending this church. To solve this problem, this thesis project is purposed to find a biblical solution to this lack of fellowship and love. One possible biblical solution would be to celebrate the Lord's Supper and a communal meal, the love feast, every week, and this thesis will be tested by asking research questions of the congregation to determine whether fellowship and love have truly been strengthened or not.¹

Ministry Context

Garden City Bible Fellowship is the context in which this thesis project has been formulated, and the writer is their pastor. It is a small congregation comprised of twenty-eight members, and on any given Sunday morning Garden City Bible Fellowship has thirty-three regular attendees including non-members. Of these thirty-three regular attendees, the average attendance on the average Sunday is approximately twenty-five, with eight or so absent for various reasons. Almost all the attendees are married. Only four adults remain single, and there is also a child. The congregation is primarily female. Nineteen of the regular attendees are women, and fourteen of the regular attendees are men. Of these twenty-eight members and thirty-three

¹ John Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 6th ed., (London: Gale ECCO, 2010), 1-2.

attendees, eighty percent are above the age of sixty, and twenty percent are below the age of forty. This contrasts with the rest of evangelical Christianity in America, which is a category to which Garden City Bible Fellowship belongs, where only twenty percent of the attendees are above the age of sixty-five. Therefore, this marks a complete reversal from the average evangelical church.² There is only one member between the ages of forty and sixty in the congregation and represents a missing generation in this church, and she has personally lamented this fact in private. Furthermore, only one attendee is below the age of twenty, representing another generational gap. This begs the question of how these gaps came to be.

The generations that are hardly represented (0-20 and 40-60) are linked. First, the younger generation does not exist because attendees in their twenties and thirties have not had children yet—not one—but this will likely change in the near future. However, the primary reason there are no teenagers is due to the fact that there are no middle-aged adults in their forties and fifties. One generation's absence results in another, later generation's absence. The primary cause of the declining number of attendees below the age of sixty in the past at Garden City Bible Fellowship stems from a trend that unfortunately continues today in the church as a whole. This trend is apostasy in the church. As John said in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."³ Most Americans who were raised in a local church will abandon it. This trend is confirmed statistically with LifeWay's research finding that sixty-six percent of young adults will stop attending a local church after they turn

² "Age Distribution," Pew Research Center, accessed September 1, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/age-distribution>.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

eighteen.⁴ Personal testimony confirms this statistic because three separate individuals at Garden City Bible Fellowship have confided in their pastor that their children abandoned the faith altogether as young adults and took the grandchildren with them. This resulted in a church that is small and lopsided in age and demographics.

Demographically, this congregation is entirely comprised of Caucasian members and attendees without a single exception. This is reflective of the United States as a whole and the local community in which the church was planted. According to Pew Research, eighty percent of churches in the United States are comprised primarily of one ethnicity.⁵ After personally inviting the majority of the neighborhood around Garden City Bible Fellowship's building, personal experience can attest that the neighborhood, Garden City, is predominantly Caucasian as well. Economically, those who are above the age of sixty have almost all retired by this point with sizable retirement funds that allow them to be self-sufficient. Consequently, this generation constitutes the vast majority of the financial support at Garden City Bible Fellowship. On the other hand, the younger generations all have full-time jobs. Only two individuals of the younger generation work irregular hours, making them available to gather on weekday mornings. This will be an important factor later on. Overall, in terms of finances, Garden City Bible Fellowship's members are doing well financially, similar to the many Southern Baptist churches that surround Garden City Bible Fellowship. Statistics show that over half of Southern Baptist members earn between \$30,000 and \$99,999, with about a third earning between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and this is true of Garden City Bible Fellowship as well if the amount of money

⁴ Aaron Earls, "Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults," LifeWay, published January 15, 2019, accessed September 1, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults>.

⁵ Michael Lipka, "Many U.S. Congregations Are Still Racially Segregated, but Things Are Changing," Pew Research Center, published December 8, 2014, accessed September 1, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/08/many-u-s-congregations-are-still-racially-segregated-but-things-are-changing-2>.

donated by each family is an indication.⁶ The high percentage of elderly members and attendees contributes to this trend, and the many elderly members and attendees reflect the historic nature of Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Garden City Bible Fellowship was planted in 1953. In fact, two of the current members are not only founding members, but they also helped build the church's building by hand. The rest of the congregation might not have built the church's building by hand, but most have been members of Garden City Bible Fellowship for more than thirty years. Consequently, this has created a culture that highly values loyalty and consistency, and this also necessitates an intervention that allows new attendees and members to be considered loyal and consistent as well. As someone who joined Garden City Bible Fellowship recently with his wife, it is plain to see which attendees have been there for decades and which have not. It is easy to make this distinction because the split is primarily by age. If someone is above the age of sixty, then he or she has probably been attending Garden City Bible Fellowship for decades, with only three exceptions. If someone is below the age of forty, then he or she probably only started attending Garden City Bible Fellowship recently. Only one person, the only child attendee, has family (grandparents) in the church and has attended his entire life. In light of this, one could assert that it is difficult for new attendees to assimilate into the church because there is a clear group of older attendees who have been present for decades and who all know each other very well.

Observing the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship, particularly who does and does not attend events other than the regular Sunday morning gatherings, reveals there is a clear trend. Not only is it almost exclusively the elderly who attend Sunday school and the Wednesday Bible

⁶ David Masci, "How income varies among U.S. religious groups," Pew Research Center, published October 11, 2016, accessed February 16, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups>.

study, these elderly attendees are all also the elderly who have attended Garden City Bible Fellowship for decades. The elderly who only recently began attending Garden City Bible Fellowship during the primary Sunday morning gathering do not attend the other events. In fact, there has been a noticeable trend lately. When a guest, young or old, visits during one of these events other than the regular Sunday morning gathering, they do not return. For new attendees, they only stay if they visited during the primary Sunday morning gathering. Therefore, the delineation between the attendees of Garden City is twofold. There are the elderly and the youthful, and there are those who have attended for decades and those who have only recently begun attending. This delineation will be one of the contributing factors to the problem presented later on, along with the culture of Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Culturally, as a church in the historic Southern United States in Roanoke, Virginia, rituals have unsurprisingly become central to the congregation's culture. For example, when the church was planted in the 1950's, Sunday school classes, which arose in the nineteenth century, were at the height of their popularity, resulting in a tradition that always immediately precedes the Sunday morning gathering.⁷ Currently, the number of class options is limited. Only two are offered. Nevertheless, Sunday school is considered non-negotiable if someone is to be considered a regular participant in the church by the elderly. Consequently, the intervention must shift the focus to another event, one that the majority will attend. The same can be said of the Wednesday Bible study. Unlike approximately ninety percent of churches, Garden City Bible Fellowship does not meet on Wednesday night, but rather on Wednesday morning.⁸ As an older

⁷ Livia Gershon, "Where Sunday School Comes From," JSTOR, published April 22, 2018, accessed on February 16, 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/where-sunday-school-comes-from>.

⁸ Aaron Earls, "Survey Reveals 90 Percent of Churches Meet on Wednesday Nights," Baptist Reflector, published September 17, 2019, accessed February 16, 2020, <https://baptistandreflector.org/survey-reveals-90-percent-of-churches-meet-on-wednesday-nights>.

congregation with approximately fifteen retired members, they have gathered only on Wednesday mornings for years, even though this excludes the younger working members. Once again, the Wednesday Bible study is considered non-negotiable if someone is to be considered a regular participant in the church by the elderly. This results in those who attend these two additional events being a very close-knit group, while the rest of the members are considered beloved but less committed. Again, this requires the intervention to shift the focus to an event that all generations can attend and that is inherently more important than extra-biblical Sunday school classes or Wednesday Bible studies. The intervention must shift the elderly's priorities, even though these extra activities are important, especially in the eyes of Garden City Bible Fellowship, which prioritizes Scripture.

Garden City Bible Fellowship loves the Scriptures and has a very high view of them due to 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Due to this high view of Scripture, there is a great desire for teachings in the form of Sunday school and the Wednesday Bible study. These two traditions are almost considered a litmus test for whether or not someone is truly fellowshiping in the congregation, though this is an implicit assumption and does not overshadow the regular Sunday morning gathering.

The Sunday morning gathering revolves around the preaching of the Scriptures, which again reflects the congregation's desire to learn from God's Word. Those who attend do so regularly, rarely ever missing a Sunday gathering. This is true regardless of the age of the attendees, though there is a tangible divide between the congregation regarding age. There is a missing generation, with almost no one present in their forties or fifties. This leaves a sizable group in their twenties and thirties and a sizable group in their sixties and higher. When the

gathering is dismissed, it is clear that there is a divide between the two groups. The elderly members are loving toward the younger members, but it is clear that both groups are unfamiliar with one another due to a lack of interaction. Furthermore, the younger members are rarely able to attend the Wednesday Bible study due to work, and they attend Sunday school at a lower percentage than the older members, compounding the divide. Therefore, the intervention of this thesis project must take these factors into consideration by implementing an intervention that causes the two generations to interact with one another. The intervention must take place in conjunction with the weekly Sunday gathering (since that is the only time the older and younger generations are together) and must force the two to interact with one another (since the older and younger generations rarely converse with one another voluntarily). Of the regularly scheduled gatherings, Sunday school, the Sunday gathering, and the Wednesday Bible study are the only gatherings that occur weekly. However, there is a regularly scheduled practice that occurs four times a year at Garden City Bible Fellowship, and this is the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Garden City Bible Fellowship was not always named "Garden City Bible Fellowship." Originally, they were "Garden City Grace Brethren Church." They removed themselves from the denomination due to theological differences, which is another example of their fidelity to the Scriptures. However, despite pulling out of the denomination due to its novel theological developments, the church has maintained the historic theological convictions of the denomination. This includes eating potlucks in conjunction with the Lord's Supper.⁹ Most churches do not have potluck meals as integral aspects of the Lord's Supper, which makes the Lord's Supper a special, unifying occasion for Garden City Bible Fellowship, which is ideal for this intervention. The sanctity of the Lord's Supper results in the members, especially the

⁹ "Our Identity," Charis Fellowship, accessed September 1, 2019, <https://charisfellowship.us/cci>.

women, exerting a great amount of effort when cooking for the Lord's Supper, and the work does not end there. More effort is exerted to set up for the Lord's Supper, and the standard is perfection. Due to the sanctity of the Lord's Supper and the effort needed to celebrate it in this church, it is only practiced four times each year—Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. These four Lord's Supper celebrations have gone smoothly in recent years.

The quality of the fellowship at Garden City Bible Fellowship during past celebrations of the Lord's Supper with a communal meal has been quite good, at least to the visible eye. In fact, the quality of the fellowship during the Lord's Supper has been so good that it is surprising the fellowship and love at this church are so poor in general. An explanation for this paradox is the infrequency of the Lord's Supper. The attendees simply do not want to celebrate it often, despite the fact that they have no negative memories of past Lord's Suppers. They have always gone well, but they occur too infrequently to permanently impact the fellowship and love at the church. Therefore, an increase in the frequency of the Lord's Supper with a communal meal becomes the most viable and straightforward and biblical intervention for Garden City Bible Fellowship. One of the reasons the fellowship during the past Lord's Suppers has been good is the ease of logistics, allowing the congregation to focus on each other.

A primary cause of success when celebrating the Lord's Supper at Garden City Bible Fellowship is the readily available resources. These resources include dining space for about fifty people, tables and seating for about fifty people, tablecloths, plates, utensils, serving equipment, cooled and heated storage, and kitchen space. Moreover, finances are not an issue when celebrating the Lord's Supper because everything, from food to replacement plates and utensils and napkins, are voluntarily provided by the participants. What is lacking according to the congregation is time. Between the necessary amount of time to prepare the dining commons and

the self-imposed amount of time to prepare elaborate dishes, time has always been the primary complaint of the Lord's Supper in the past. During the tenure of the previous pastor at Garden City Bible Fellowship, the leadership conversed with the congregation about having potluck meals monthly, and this was rejected by the congregation at the time. Their primary reason was the amount of effort needed to prepare these potlucks. The elderly attendees did not want to spend time cooking on Saturday night once per month, even though the previous pastor had insisted that the food did not need to be fancy or time-consuming to prepare. Another issue is personal influence due to this writer's relatively short amount of experience pastoring this church. If any changes are to be made to how the Lord's Supper is celebrated, persuasion is necessary, especially in light of the previous denial of participation in monthly potlucks. The attendees have celebrated the Lord's Supper the same way for decades, and any changes to the frequency and order will require cooperation and understanding between one another, particularly among the leadership of Garden City Bible Fellowship. These obstacles must be overcome if the problem is to be solved in a biblical way.

Problem Presented

No local church is perfect, and two areas in which Garden City Bible Fellowship is lacking are fellowship and love. This is evident in the aforementioned Ministry Context. There is a tangible divide between the older and younger attendees and the attendees who have been attending for decades and those who have only recently started attending. Fellowship and love will not improve by continuing to observe the current schedule. In fact, the current schedule exacerbates the problem. Members are considered to be fellowshiping when they participate in the church's activities together, whether the activity be Sunday school, the Sunday gathering, or the Wednesday Bible study. However, only one of the younger attendees are able to attend the

Wednesday Bible study due to work, and only three younger attendees regularly attend Sunday school classes due to a lack of interest in the topics, even though there are no scheduling conflicts on Sunday mornings for these attendees. The problem is that there is a dichotomy between the congregation, resulting in a lack of fellowship and love in a demonstrable way.

While participating in the Lord's Supper, conversations among the members reveal that most members have never eaten a meal with other members of Garden City Bible Fellowship. The only meals they have eaten together are the potluck meals during the Lord's Supper, and this is based on the assumption that everyone is attending and participating in these meals, which is not guaranteed. Furthermore, the frequency of these meals is incredibly low, so the fellowship at these meals has not had lasting effects. Due to this lack of fellowship, the conversations at the Lord's Supper are surface-level, pertaining to rudimentary topics that the most basic of friends should know about one another. This problem is surprising given the familial nature of the church, but it is not surprising given the aforementioned Ministry Context. Other churches are in even worse settings. They have members who do not even know each other's names, and other thesis projects (which will be referenced later on) have attempted to find a solution to this problem. Furthermore, with the definition of the word "love," one could hardly say that the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship love one another, at least in the sense of *agapē* love, which will be defined shortly. If it requires preparing food and bringing it to the church, then they do not think eating a meal together is worth their effort, which is a demonstrable lack of love. Therefore, this thesis project will address this lack of fellowship and love among the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to build true fellowship and love

among the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship in a biblical way. The individuals of this church are not fellowshiping nor loving to the extent that God intended. The church is a family, one whose members have so much in common and are so close that they would lay their lives down for one another, but one would be hard-pressed to find such a kind of fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship. This purpose is always what God intended in his church, and the reader of Scripture needs to look no further than Jesus's prayer in John 17 to observe this purpose. Fellowship and love are of the utmost importance to God, and, therefore, fellowship and love are of the utmost importance in this project. Deficiencies are unacceptable, including the problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Therefore, this project's purpose is to find a biblical solution to this problem at this church.

If successful, the tangible benefits of this project will be multitudinous for those involved. By the end, with an emphasis on mitigating superficiality, the attendees will be in deeper relationships with one another. Many clubs can claim to have fellowship, but should the purpose of this project succeed, the members will have unity and fellowship from a spiritual, eternal source that cannot be broken. Should this project achieve its purpose, the members will love one another in a spiritual, eternal way that results in self-sacrifice for one another. Consequently, the members will know exactly with whom they are worshiping on any given Sunday morning, and they will know exactly why they are all worshiping together. Now, there are gimmicks to induce fellowship in a local church. They can hold block parties. They can form small groups. However, while not discounting the benefits of other ideas to strengthen fellowship, the emphasis of this purpose will be on bringing about fellowship in a biblical way, a way that can be proven from Scripture itself. Also, again, while not discounting the benefits of other ideas to strengthen fellowship, these gimmicks are not associated with love and fellowship

in Scripture and may or may not build them. Hence, the solution must be a biblical practice, with both fellowship and love as the goal. The Scriptures are rife with practices that would build fellowship and love, but in the case of this thesis project, it will implement the biblical practice of observing the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal, even though it is not the only possible solution to this problem. Of course, this intervention strategy is based on multiple assumptions.

Basic Assumptions

Every author, pastor, and researcher must be aware of their presuppositions and assumptions, especially when attempting to solve a problem present among others under their influence. In this case, one basic assumption is the continued celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is assumed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated regularly in every church, including Garden City Bible Fellowship, if that church is to be a faithful, biblical church.¹⁰ This assumption stems from verses such as 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, "when [Jesus] had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, *as often as you drink it*, in remembrance of me'" [emphasis mine]. This will shift the research questions away from the effects of celebrating the Lord's Supper at all and toward the effects of celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently. This also eliminates the option of never celebrating the Lord's Supper from the discussion, leaving only varying degrees of frequency as viable answers to the research questions.

There is also an assumption that every church, including Garden City Bible Fellowship, should have fellowship among the individuals who are a part of it. Acts 2:42 is one of many

¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1036-1037.

verses that establish the basis of this assumption, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Without this assumption, then there would not be a problem to address, because there would not be a biblical precedent for fellowship in the church. Another assumption is that fellowship is not present in a church by accident. There are many ways to have fellowship in a church, and one such way also arises from Acts 2:42, where “fellowship” is listed in conjunction with “teaching,” “breaking of bread,” and “prayers.” Therefore, “the breaking of bread” is a biblical intervention that can subsequently compensate for this deficiency, and this biblical intervention is also observable. Therefore, the survey results should tangibly demonstrate whether fellowship has improved. Similarly, the Bible references a communal meal of which the early churches (like the one in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11) partook, also known as the “love feast” in Jude 1:12. Therefore, since the Scriptures link the breaking of bread (which is a reference to the Lord’s Supper, as proven in Chapter 2) with fellowship and a communal meal with love, it can be assumed these are viable, biblical interventions for this thesis project. Before proving the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly with a communal meal, it is first necessary to define key words.

Definitions

It is necessary to define key words that have arisen so far. For example, the words “member” and “attendee” have been used frequently, and there is a simple differentiation between these two words. “Attendee” refers to anyone who attends the Sunday morning worship gathering at least once per month, while “member” refers to anyone who attends the Sunday morning worship gathering at least once per month, has been baptized, and has covenanted himself or herself to Garden City Bible Fellowship and to participate in its ministries. This distinction is useful when describing the context of Garden City Bible Fellowship, because the

attendees are more likely to be younger Christians who have not covenanted themselves to this local church yet, and members are more likely to participate. This distinction will be recognized in the research process, a necessary delimitation that will be expounded upon in the following chapters. For the remaining definitions, they all will be primarily biblical. By “biblical,” what is meant is something explicitly or implicitly taught or practiced in Scripture in its original context. It does not mean morally required, but rather biblically present. This definition is especially important when defining the most important word in this project.

The renowned *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* provides a scholarly definition of *koinōnia*, saying that this word “denotes ‘participation,’ ‘fellowship,’ esp. with a close bond.”¹¹ In the first century, secular sources, such as the historic Jewish philosopher, Philo, and historian, Josephus, used *koinōnia* to describe “the living relationship,” the ideal relationship that should exist between two parties, whether between two men or between a man and God.¹² Paul parallels this definition, but adds a Christian worldview to it. Specifically, according to Hauck, “Paul uses *koinōnia* for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings.”¹³ When using the word *koinōnia* and its various forms, such as *koinos*, the meaning begins with a metaphysical, theoretical common ground, but the meaning goes beyond this. It manifests itself visibly and actively in the form of “participation,” another foundational definition of the word.¹⁴ Paul uses the word *koinos* alongside the word “faith” in Titus 1:4 to describe the fact that Paul and Titus have the same, common confession of faith in

¹¹ Friedrich Hauck, “*Koinōnia*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume III*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 798.

¹² Ibid., 803.

¹³ Ibid., 804.

¹⁴ Ibid., 797.

Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. On a similar note, Jude uses the word *koinos* alongside “salvation” in Jude 1:3 to refer to the same, common source of justification for Jude and his original audience. It is these common foundations (faith and salvation) that allows for the common participation and fellowship in the church.

As mentioned previously, Paul is very familiar with the word *koinōnia* and its various forms, which is why he uses it quite freely. He builds on the theoretical common ground of faith and salvation by saying in 1 Corinthians 1:9 that, “you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” *Koinōnia* describes an active participation and active fellowship with Jesus. This fellowship with Christ sounds nebulous, but Hauck provides a summary of its meaning, “Fellowship with Christ means that present participation in one phase, namely, that of humility and suffering, assures us of winning through to participation in the other, namely, that of glory.”¹⁵ Fellowship with Jesus necessitates mirroring His actions and His life, and one way to do that is by celebrating the Lord’s Supper. This same concept applies to fellowship with the Spirit in Philippians 2:1, but instead of the Christian participating with Jesus by mirroring His past actions, the Christian participates with the Spirit by partnering with Him in his or her present actions.¹⁶ The Christian’s fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit describes a theoretical and practical commonality, and this is true in other relationships as well.

On a human level, another way to demonstrate the nuanced meaning of the word *koinōnia* is in 1 Corinthians 9:23, where Paul says, “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” Here, “them” refers to anyone, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul’s goal is for everyone to “share,” or “participate,” in the blessings of the gospel. This use of

¹⁵ Hauck, “*Koinōnia*,” 806.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 807.

koinōnia shows both the theoretical aspect (the common ground Christians have by believing the gospel) and the active aspect (Christians participate in the gospel by continuing to believe in it and enjoying its benefits together).¹⁷ For Paul, this fellowship and participation with Christ and the Spirit necessarily results in a fellowship and participation with those who also have fellowship with Christ and the Spirit, namely, the church. Perhaps the clearest examples of this is Paul's use of the word *koinōnia* in Philippians 1:7, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all *partakers* with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" [emphasis mine].¹⁸ This one verse provides the entire scope of the meaning of *koinōnia*. There is the theoretical common ground that all Christians have, which is God's grace. Then, there is the practical participation together in the form of supporting Paul while he was imprisoned and in the form of preaching the gospel together. Therefore, fellowship is a common ground shared by multiple parties that results in them collaborating with one another toward a common end. In the New Testament, this includes common ground and participation with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, one another, the gospel, the faith, grace, and salvation.

This summary is confirmed by J. R. McRay, who provides his theological definition when he says, "The basic meaning conveyed by the Greek term *koinōnia* is that of participation."¹⁹ He expands his definition of fellowship by saying, "Friendship is a supreme expression of fellowship."²⁰ To describe this fellowship, he uses words like "sharing" and "self-

¹⁷ Hauck, "*Koinōnia*," 804.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 807.

¹⁹ J. R. McRay, "Fellowship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 445.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

sacrifice” and “unity.”²¹ Not coincidentally, one of the primary demonstrations and causes of fellowship referenced by McRay is none other than the Lord’s Supper.²² Therefore, a correlation between fellowship and the Lord’s Supper is self-evident. In light of this definition of fellowship, when it is asserted that there is a lack of fellowship and love among the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship, it implies that there is a lack of participation, friendship, sharing, and self-sacrifice. If the Lord’s Supper with a communal meal is a demonstration and cause of fellowship, as McRay proposes, then it is a viable solution to the problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship.

There is a lack of participation because the only consistent opportunities to participate on a consistent basis are Sunday school, the Sunday morning worship gathering, and the Wednesday morning Bible study. Currently, the majority of attendees only participate in one of these events, the Sunday morning worship gathering, which naturally results in a lack of participation by the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship. There is a lack of friendship because there is a lack of sharing. Even if every single attendee of Garden City Bible Fellowship was to attend all three events, there would still be a lack of sharing due to a lack of opportunities to share. All three gatherings are almost exclusively dedicated to teaching, with one man teaching, and almost no time for interaction. Consequently, there is a lack of self-sacrifice for one another and unity on anything other than an intellectual level, something McRay denies as a full expression of fellowship and unity on its own.²³ This definition of fellowship also provides this thesis with a tangible goal, namely, to bolster each attendee’s participation with Garden City Bible Fellowship, the friendships between the attendees, the extent to which they share with one

²¹ McRay, “Fellowship,” 445.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

another, the extent of their unity, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of another attendee. This necessitates a definition of a biblical means of obtaining this fellowship. Unsurprisingly, the proposition is that a biblical means of obtaining fellowship is the aforementioned Lord's Supper and its accompanying communal meal, the love feast. By observing the Lord's Supper and the love feast more frequently, there should be a significant increase in all aspects of fellowship, such as in common ground and participation with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, with one another as Garden City Bible Fellowship, in the gospel, in the faith, and in grace, which will theoretically also cause a significant increase in love.

Before defining the Lord's Supper, it is necessary to define the words used to identify it, namely "sacrament" or "ordinance." "Sacrament" simply means, according to R. S. Wallace, "A religious rite or ceremony instituted or recognized by Jesus Christ."²⁴ Specifically, Garden City Bible Fellowship recognizes the sacraments of baptism and Lord's Supper as being the only sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. This is an unsurprising conclusion since Garden City Bible Fellowship is a Protestant church and is carrying on the same conclusion of the original Reformer, Martin Luther, who was one of the first to recognize only two sacraments.²⁵ Regarding what these sacraments accomplish, Wallace describes them, along with Augustine of Hippo, as "'a visible word' or an 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.'"²⁶ Therefore, a sacrament is a ceremony commanded by Jesus Christ to the church with the purpose of confirming and demonstrating the presence of God's grace, with both

²⁴ R. S. Wallace, "Sacrament," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1047.

²⁵ John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History, Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 122-123.

²⁶ Wallace, "Sacrament," 1047.

parties being active.²⁷ For the Lord's Supper, this grace entails participation and union with Christ according to 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" However, the grace of fellowship in the Lord's Supper does not stop with Jesus Christ, but rather continues to the participants in 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the grace that demonstrates and confirms fellowship with Jesus Christ and one another as a church. It should be noted that "sacrament" has become affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries, and this results in Protestant churches, including Garden City Bible Fellowship, referring to the Lord's Supper as an ordinance instead. However, despite the desire to use a different word, the definition of "ordinance" is essentially the same as the definition of "sacrament," making them interchangeable. Now that the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper have been referenced, it is time to define the Lord's Supper itself.

"The Lord's Supper" refers to a meal, which includes the bread and wine that Jesus instituted for his church in four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians.²⁸ The idea that the Lord's Supper includes a meal is supported by the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, which defines the word *deipnon* (translated as "supper" in "the Lord's Supper") as "the meal consecrated by the Lord" when used with the adjective *kuriakon* (translated as "Lord's" in "the Lord's Supper").²⁹ Wallace provides a definition by saying,

²⁷ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 514.

²⁸ R. S. Wallace, "The Lord's Supper," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 703.

²⁹ J. Behm, "*deipnon*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume II*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 34.

“There is a real life-giving relationship of communion between the events and realities, past, present, and future, symbolized in the supper and those who participate in it (John 6:51 ;1 Cor. 10:16). This communion is so inseparable from participation in the supper that we can speak of the bread and the wine as if they were indeed the body and blood of Christ.”³⁰ Therefore, the Lord’s Supper is a meal that the church participates in by consuming bread and wine (or possibly grape juice), but that is where the similarity ends with other common meals. This meal has an expressed, spiritual purpose given by the one who instituted it—Jesus Christ himself. This purpose is to unite believers with himself in his death and resurrection, and to unite believers with one another in fellowship and communion. This communion is so important that it appears in the Apostles’ Creed, which confesses “the communion of the saints,” and either refers to the primacy of Christian fellowship in general or specifically the Lord’s Supper.³¹ Either way, fellowship and love and communion are clearly important aspects of the Christian faith and have been for millennia. By using the word “communion,” another aspect of the definition of the Lord’s Supper is revealed, which is the flexible verbiage used by churches to refer to the Lord’s Supper.

There are multitudinous ways to refer to the Lord’s Supper in modern, English-speaking churches. Obviously, “the Lord’s Supper” is how this thesis project will primarily refer to this sacrament, but sources to follow will refer to the Lord’s Supper by differing names. The title bestowed on the Lord’s Supper by the very early church in the second century is “eucharist,”³² though this word has fallen out of favor, much like the word “sacrament,” because of its

³⁰ Wallace, “The Lord’s Supper,” 704.

³¹ F. Q. Gouvea, “Communion of Saints,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 277.

³² Valeriy A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries*, (Boston: Brill, 2010), 108.

association with Roman Catholicism. Alternatively, another way to refer to the Lord's Supper, especially in Protestant circles, is "communion." John Tillotson, a Protestant from the seventeenth century, wrote an entire treatise in favor of celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently, in which he demonstrates the modern church's shift to the use of the word "communion" to refer to the Lord's Supper in his book *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*.³³ While there are various ways to refer to the Lord's Supper, they all refer to the same sacrament or ordinance. However, the meal that accompanies the Lord's Supper, the love feast, deserves its own definition, along with the definition of the word "love" in general since it underlies the meal.

The "love feast" has its root in the Greek word *agapē*, meaning "love." In the words of H. W. Hoehner, *agapē* is defined as "an unmerited, self-giving love."³⁴ Due to the many words in Greek that denote "love," the differences and nuances between them are noteworthy. *Agapē* communicates an unconditional love that is unselfish and does not look for gain. Leon Morris's explanation of *agapē* is noteworthy in this context, "it is not a love that desires to possess. On the contrary, ... it is a love that seeks to give."³⁵ This definition of love corresponds directly to Garden City Bible Fellowship's deficiency. Their unwillingness to prepare food on a monthly basis for a potluck cannot be considered a love that seeks to give. On the contrary, it is not out of line to say they currently desire to possess their own time and food. It is easy to see why the "love feast" in Jude 12 is referred to in this manner. Voluntarily taking the time to contribute to and participate in a communal meal indicates participants' desire to give to one another, to love.

³³ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 1.

³⁴ H. W. Hoehner, "Love," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 708.

³⁵ Hoehner, "Love," 709.

D. H. Wheaton provides three, common, practical uses of the word “love” in the church, but he settles on this description of the “love feast,” “Gradually, the term came to be applied to a common meal shared by believers. Although these meals are called *agapai* only in Jude 12 and possibly 2 Peter 2:13, where there is a variant reading of *agapais* for *apatais* (‘deceivings’), there is a considerable amount of other evidence for their existence in the early church.”³⁶ That the early church ate meals together is self-evident in Chapter 2, but their frequency and accompaniment is debatable and one of the controversies addressed in this thesis. It is sufficient to say that Wheaton proposes the love feast occurred in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper, the aforementioned sacrament of bread and wine.³⁷ With these definitions established, the foundation of this intervention is also established. Now, the frequency of the Lord’s Supper and whether it includes the love feast and how it develops fellowship and love is the defining focus and the primary research purpose of this thesis project. However, first, it is necessary to address any limitations and delimitations inherent to this thesis project and the research that will occur during it.

Limitations

It is necessary to recognize the limitations inherent in this research project. For example, the sampling pool of this research project will be limited. At most, the number of participants will be approximately thirty-three, unless there is a sudden influx of attendees. It is more likely that the number of participants will be closer to twenty or possibly less. Moreover, the consistency of participation is a limitation. Twenty might participate in this research project but

³⁶ D. H. Wheaton, “Love Feast,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 711.

³⁷ Wheaton, “Love Feast,” 712.

not participate in three or more Lord's Suppers and communal meals at Garden City Bible Fellowship. This could result in questions being answered in ignorance, if they even qualify to complete the conclusory survey by participating in enough meals. On a similar note, there is a limitation regarding the answers in general due to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. As their pastor, the participants in the Lord's Supper could desire to provide positive answers even if these answers are contrary to their true thoughts and feelings. To combat this limitation, anonymity will be maintained during the research process. There will also be a limited opportunity to implement the proposed thesis of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in terms of the calendar. There are also limitations in the nature of the research.

There is a limitation in attempting to find a solution to a lack of fellowship and love. Fellowship is a broad term in the New Testament, used in many different contexts. Therefore, there is a limitation when identifying the Lord's Supper and a communal meal as the solution to this problem. It is possible that there are other biblical solutions to the problem of the lack of fellowship. However, the Lord's Supper in the context of a communal meal is the best intervention because it overlaps with the other problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship, which is a lack of love. The Lord's Supper is directly associated with fellowship in Acts 2:42, and the communal meal is even called "the love feast." Therefore, celebrating the Lord's Supper in the context of a communal meal weekly is a viable, biblical intervention to solve the problem of a lack of fellowship and love. After all, this intervention tangibly intersects with both the deficiencies of fellowship and love in a biblical way.

Similarly, the research is limited because it pertains to the effects of increasing fellowship in terms of quantity at Garden City Bible Fellowship rather than the quality. It is difficult to discern the effects of the quality of the fellowship because the quality of the fellowship itself is

difficult to determine. Hence, in the surveys administered during this thesis project, the effects of increasing the frequency of fellowship will be emphasized because frequency is quantitative and measurable. The survey will still ask questions regarding the quality of the fellowship, but the questions will focus primarily on whether the participants' views change regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper and whether they perceive an improvement in fellowship due to the increase in frequency of the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, there is a limitation concerning the quality of the fellowship that will occur during the upcoming celebrations of the Lord's Supper. These celebrations in the past have had good fellowship during them, so it will be assumed that the fellowship during the upcoming celebrations of the Lord's Supper will be up to the standard. This, however is a noteworthy limitation. Despite these external limitations, the research process should still yield reliable results, especially when necessary delimitations are considered.

Delimitations

During the research process, it is necessary to impose limitations and constraints. On a theoretical level, there is a delimitation of focus. While this thesis will lay out the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal, the goal is not to establish the moral obligation to follow this practice. Rather, the goal is to observe the benefits to fellowship and love by applying this practice in a church. On a theological level, there is a delimitation. This thesis will not address the debate regarding the nature of the Lord's Supper, whether the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed interpretation of the phrase "this is my body" is correct.³⁸ On a practical level, the primary constraint pertains to the qualifications to participate. Only baptized believers will be allowed to participate because only baptized

³⁸ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Alan W. Gomes, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 813.

believers are allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. After all, if someone has not obeyed the first sacrament of baptism, then it is not prudent to allow them to participate in the second sacrament either. Therefore, only baptized believers are allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper.³⁹ Consequently, this delimits the available pool of participants. Moreover, only believers who are in good standing will be allowed to participate, and this delimitation arises from 1 Corinthians 11:27, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord." While there is currently no one at Garden City Bible Fellowship under church discipline, should someone come under discipline, he or she will not be allowed to partake out of reverence for the Lord's Supper.

The timing of the Lord's Supper will also be a delimitation. There is one couple who often works on Sunday afternoons, resulting in them being unable to participate in any activities after noon. This would preclude them from participating in this research because the Lord's Supper will be celebrated immediately following the Sunday morning worship gathering, which ends between 12:00 P.M. and 12:15 P.M. While these delimitations are consequential choices, a necessary delimitation exists as well. When the participants answer their questionnaires, they must mention whether they are a member or an attendee. This will present two, separate but related answers, with the answers provided by the members receiving slightly more credence than those provided by the attendees, resulting in clear trends in the attendees and members.

Thesis Statement

If the problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship is a lack of fellowship and love, then one biblical solution is celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in the context of a fellowship meal. One

³⁹ Nathan Finn, "Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord's Supper," The Center for Theological Research, published September 2006, 13, <http://www.baptisttheology.org/baptisttheology/assets/file/baptismasprerequisiteforsupper.pdf>.

example of fellowship in the local church is the Lord's Supper according to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, which churches celebrated weekly in Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, which will be key passages in the next chapter. More specifically, the Lord's Supper likely also included a fellowship meal, also known as the love feast in Jude 12, which is a natural conclusion from 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 and the origin of the Lord's Supper, which is the Passover meal in the Synoptic Gospels. By implementing this biblical practice at Garden City Bible Fellowship, rather than celebrate the Lord's Supper on quarterly schedule, emphasis will shift from an overemphasis on extra-biblical practices (such as Sunday school and the Wednesday Bible study) to a biblical practice specifically designed to promote fellowship and love. After observing the Lord's Supper weekly during a communal meal, the effect on fellowship and love will be tested by asking research questions. Particularly, these questions will pertain to any practical changes to how the participants view the Lord's Supper and the love feast and to whether or not fellowship and love were strengthened among the attendees of Garden City Garden Fellowship after implementing and celebrating the Lord's Supper and the love feast weekly.

Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework

Why is this problem being addressed? After all, if it was necessary, the Ministry Context of Garden City Bible Fellowship could have been filled with other descriptions and problems that could have been addressed. Why does this particular problem of lack of fellowship and love need to be addressed, and why is this particular intervention (the celebration of the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal) the proposed solution? The answer to these questions is multifaceted with Scripture being the primary source of information. This chapter will demonstrate the primacy of fellowship and love as a priority for churches in the New Testament and the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper with a communal meal weekly. First, however, it is necessary to consider the views of previous scholars on this subject.

Literature Review

Beginning broadly, all the current literature can agree that the elements of the Lord's Supper are the bread and the cup.¹ As proven by the following, Scripture refers to the Lord's Supper as the breaking of bread and the sharing of a cup, and these elements are present in the very definition of the Lord's Supper.² An area of opinion in the current literature is the contents of the cup, whether wine or grape juice, the latter of which is a recent development. However, replacing alcoholic wine with a non-alcoholic substitute is not new. Pious Christians in the early church who were seeking to avoid alcohol replaced the wine with water, but this practice has fallen out of favor, especially with the advent of grape juice.³ Consequently, in today's literature,

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, ed. Anthony Uyl, (Woodstock, ON: Devoted, 2017), 335.

² J. Behm, "Klāō," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey Bromily, Gerhard Friedrich, & Gerhard Kittel, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 438.

³ Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) 87, 102.

all can agree that the contents of the cup originate from the vine.⁴ All the literature agrees with the association of the bread and the cup with Jesus's body and blood.⁵ As mentioned previously as a delimitation, the exact nature of the association of the bread and the cup with Jesus's body and blood is a theological debate that is not relevant to this thesis. Moreover, this debate would warrant its own literature review and even its own thesis project. What is relevant is the association of the bread and the cup with Jesus's body and blood and the fellowship that the participants might have with him and with one another.

Fellowship

The purposes and benefits of the Lord's Supper are multitudinous, and there are common themes in the literature. In relation to Jesus, celebrating the Lord's Supper demonstrates union and fellowship with him as one's Savior according to David Gordon.⁶ In fact, in Valeriy Alikin's book that provides a detailed account of the early church's practices, including the Lord's Supper, Ignatius, a second-century Christian teacher, sees the Lord's Supper as confirmation that one is truly saved and part of the church and as a barrier to falling away from the faith.⁷ In relation to one another, the Lord's Supper brings about fellowship and unity based upon who Jesus Christ is and what he did on behalf of the participants in the church.⁸ According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, this fellowship with one another because of Christ

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford, *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 282.

⁵ Behm, "Klāō," 437.

⁶ T. David Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?" Orthodox Presbyterian Church, accessed August 4, 2019, https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=104.

⁷ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 133.

⁸ Ibid., 104-105.

has been the benefit of the Lord's Supper since its institution in the Upper Room before Jesus' crucifixion.⁹ The historical author, John Tillotson, pleads for churches to increase the frequency of the Lord's Supper in his book, stating that on a personal level, the Lord's Supper is a benefit because it reminds the individual of who Jesus is and that he is coming back.¹⁰ Furthermore, on a personal level, Thomas Schreiner and Richard Mayhue state in their more modern treatise on the Lord's Supper that the Lord's Supper is a benefit because it forces the participant to examine himself or herself and repent from any sins that escaped the person's notice.¹¹ In this thesis, the benefit of the fellowship is the most relevant, both the fellowship with Christ and with one another that results, but particularly, the fellowship with one another.¹² The literature agrees not only on the end result of celebrating the Lord's Supper, but also the origin.

Origin

With one exception who insists the Lord's Supper was instituted twenty-four hours before the Passover meal,¹³ the literature agrees that the origin of the Lord's Supper is in the context of the Passover meal (though the exact year is up for debate),¹⁴ particularly the celebration of the Passover in the Upper Room between Jesus and his twelve disciples the night before Jesus was crucified.¹⁵ The aforementioned bread and cup that compose the Lord's Supper

⁹ Leonhard Goppelt, "Potérion," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume VI*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 154.

¹⁰ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 2.

¹¹ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, xvii.

¹² F. Hauck, "Koinós," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey Bromily, Gerhard Friedrich, & Gerhard Kittel, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 449.

¹³ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1981), 122.

¹⁴ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Teachings of Jesus*, (San Francisco: Hendrickson, 1991), 298.

¹⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 335-336.

find their origin in the Passover, which similarly included breaking bread and drinking from the vine.¹⁶ Even two authors who otherwise disagree with one another, Valeriy Alikin and Bryan Spinks, agree with one another on this issue,¹⁷ that the Lord's Supper finds its origin in context of the Passover.¹⁸ Particularly, according to Behm's discussion of the historical meaning of the verb "breaking bread," the Lord's Supper found its origin in the breaking of bread during the evening Passover meal, which preceded the third cup of thanksgiving that was passed during the Passover.¹⁹ With the genesis and the results of the Lord's Supper unanimously agreed upon in the literature, it leaves the intermediate details.

Schedule

The literature agrees that churches should celebrate the Lord's Supper on Sundays, with Thomas Schreiner being just one of many examples when he appeals to Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them," as evidence for celebrating the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, Sunday.²⁰ However, not all limit the Lord's Supper to simply the Sunday gathering of the church. The great Jonathan Edwards actually discussed the frequency of the Lord's Supper and believed it was originally offered daily, with a special emphasis on the Sunday gathering each week.²¹ He was not alone in

¹⁶ Behm, "Kláo," 437.

¹⁷ Bryan D. Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day*, (London: SCM, 2013), 6.

¹⁸ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 10.

¹⁹ Behm, "Kláo," 437.

²⁰ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, 77.

²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 264.

this interpretation either, being joined by the renowned Herbert Lockyer as well.²² They derived this belief from Acts 2:46, which the aforementioned Schreiner recognized might have been the primitive practice that was forsaken for Sundays only.²³ In Englewood Christian Church, the celebrations and meals occur on Wednesdays, but these are not identified as the Lord's Supper.²⁴ Nevertheless, regarding the day of the Lord's Supper's celebration there is unanimity in the literature that it should occur on Sunday. However, there is difference in the timing, the frequency, and the inclusion (or lack thereof) of a meal alongside the Lord's Supper.

Timing

What time of day the Lord's Supper is celebrated on Sunday is a topic that appears in various discussions in the literature, but rarely dogmatically. On the one hand, in *Feeling the Spirit*, when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, pastor Frances Kostarelos and his church celebrate it immediately following the gathering on Sunday mornings, but this is out of convenience rather than conviction.²⁵ On the other hand, Alikin argues from a biblical and a historical perspective. Biblically, she emphasizes the Greek word *deipnon*, which usually referred to the evening meal, and its use by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.²⁶ Historically, she refers to Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, which references the Lord's Supper occurring in the evening.²⁷ However, most sources do not dogmatically discuss the timing of the Lord's Supper on Sunday, whether it take place in the

²² Herbert Lockyer, *All the Doctrines of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 261.

²³ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, 77.

²⁴ C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 202.

²⁵ Frances Kostarelos, *Feeling the Spirit: Faith and Hope in an Evangelical Black Storefront Church*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1995), 91.

²⁶ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 104.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

afternoon or the evening.

Frequency

Where the literature often does speak dogmatically, though not unanimously, is regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper. The dogmatism on this subject is found on both sides of this discussion. Both the proponents of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly and their opponents (or whatever word most accurately describes those who do not celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly) are dogmatic, though the latter are ironically dogmatic that churches should not be dogmatic regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper. One such opponent is Wayne Grudem, who in his vaunted *Systematic Theology* dogmatically emphasizes Jesus's statement, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup," and leaves the frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the hands of the individual church's preference.²⁸ The arguments of those who object to the weekly celebration are best seen among the Southern Baptists, who dealt with the issue of frequency. Those who opposed the weekly frequency appealed to this common objection: the Lord's Supper will lose its meaning if it is celebrated as often as weekly.²⁹ This objection appears over³⁰ and over³¹ again.³² Gordon addresses this common objection with a twofold response. First, he asks how the objector knows for a fact the Lord's Supper will become less meaningful when it is celebrated weekly if the objector has never actually observed it weekly and experienced the

²⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 999.

²⁹ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, xvii.

³⁰ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 7.

³¹ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

³² Wilson Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus: Toward a More Sacramental Spirituality," (DMin thesis, Drew University, Madison, 2014), 83, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

results. Second, he counters the objector's argument by asking the objector if churches should similarly limit the frequency of gathering, studying the Scriptures, and praising to preserve their meaning.³³ Other objections include the fear of partaking in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, the burden of preparing for the Lord's Supper, and the failure to enjoy past celebrations of the Lord's Supper. To these objections, Wilson Jones answers with an unsympathetic, "So what?" followed by an insistence that obedience to biblical precedent (though not a mandate) is far more important than these objections.³⁴ With the objections made by those who dogmatically insist that the frequency of the Lord's Supper is not something to be dogmatic about sufficiently expounded upon, the arguments made by those who dogmatically insist the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly can be presented from the scholarly literature before being expanded in the Theological Foundations section from the Scriptures.

The arguments for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly are twofold. Biblically, the key texts are Acts 2, Acts 20, and 1 Corinthians 11. Alikin reads the list of activities in Acts 2:42, specifically learning from the apostles, praying, fellowshiping, and breaking bread, and concludes that "breaking bread" refers to the Lord's Supper. She validates this argument by correlating "breaking bread" in Acts 2:42 with "breaking bread" in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, which is clearly a reference to the Lord's Supper. Consequently, the Lord's Supper was celebrated weekly, because the other activities in Acts 2:42 are evidently weekly activities.³⁵ Schreiner refuses to see Paul's desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the church in Troas in Acts 20:7 as coincidental timing. Instead, he insists that Paul went to celebrate the Lord's Supper

³³ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

³⁴ Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus," 82-83.

³⁵ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

because churches celebrated it every week.³⁶ Similarly, Gordon, a respected Presbyterian pushing for weekly Communion in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, reads 1 Corinthians 11:20 and concludes that the phrase “when you meet together” does not allow for the Corinthians’ abuse of the Lord’s Supper as an occasional, rare event that occurred irregularly, but rather a regular event that allowed for frequent abuses.³⁷ Moreover, the proponents of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly appeal to the historical practice of the very early church in their literature.

Historically, the literature cites past Christians in favor of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly. Again, in Alikin’s historical treatise, she references the *Didache*, a very early work in church history, as proof that the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper weekly, as it says that Christians broke bread weekly during the “Eucharist.”³⁸ Bryan Spinks rejects Alikin’s conclusion that the *Didache* is referring to the Lord’s Supper when it says the early Christians broke bread together weekly, limiting its meaning to a mundane fellowship meal instead.³⁹ However, Alikin preempts this objection by correlating “breaking bread,” which appears in the *Didache*, with “breaking bread” in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, which refers to the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁰ Continuing historically, Alikin quotes Justin Martyr, another second-century writer, in support of the weekly Lord’s Supper.⁴¹ Not coincidentally, Justin Martyr’s summary of the church gathering sounds very similar to Acts 2:42’s summary of the church gathering, “From Justin’s account, we learn that the main ingredients of Christian worship in the 2nd century were (i) the reading and

³⁶ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord’s Supper*, 101.

³⁷ Gordon, “Why Weekly Communion?”

³⁸ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

³⁹ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 12, 16.

⁴⁰ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 135.

expounding of Scripture, (ii) prayer, and (iii) the celebration of the Lord's Supper."⁴² Moving forward in history, heavyweight theologians such as Charles Spurgeon⁴³ and Martin Luther⁴⁴ and John Calvin were unashamedly in favor of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, with Calvin even utilizing the same biblical argument from Acts 2:42 in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* when discussing the Lord's Supper.⁴⁵ This is clearly a widely debated issue in the current literature, whereas the following issue appears one-sided.

Inclusion of a Meal

Concerning the inclusion (or lack thereof) of a meal with the Lord's Supper, no one explicitly argues against it. It would appear that only one side has even considered this an issue worth addressing. Therefore, the literature either does not address it at all or argues in favor of an accompanying meal. Gordon concludes that the Corinthian church must have eaten a meal while they celebrated the Lord's Supper based on logical necessity. After all, how could the Corinthians be chastised for being gluttonous during the Lord's Supper if a meal did not accompany it?⁴⁶ Moreover, the context in which the Lord's Supper was instituted was the Passover meal.⁴⁷ In the words of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "The cup of blessing concluded the [Passover] meal, as the breaking of bread opened it. The eucharistic

⁴² Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 1: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2017), 73.

⁴³ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, 101.

⁴⁴ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 929-930.

⁴⁶ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

⁴⁷ Wallace, "Lord's Supper," 704.

elements are the two basic elements in a Jewish meal, as eating and drink are in every meal.”⁴⁸ Tillotson correlates this accompanying meal with the “love feast” referenced in Jude 12, wherein the purpose of the Lord’s Supper lies, which is love and fellowship.⁴⁹ This correlation between the Lord’s Supper and the love feast is the historical practice and a necessary conclusion because a communal meal is a prerequisite to the misuse of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, which appears more in-depth in the following pages.⁵⁰ These differences in the literature clearly set the stage for this intervention that will fill the current gap in the literature and attempt to solve Garden City Bible Fellowship’s lack of fellowship and love in this thesis project.

Discovery

In light of the Literature Review, there are many areas of agreement. All the literature agrees that the Lord’s Supper includes the partaking of bread and drinking from the vine, whether grape juice or wine. All the literature also agrees that one of the primary benefits of the Lord’s Supper is fellowship with Jesus and with one another as participants. Furthermore, almost all the literature agrees that the Lord’s Supper originated from the Passover, and it all agrees that the Lord’s Supper must be celebrated regularly and on Sunday. However, there is debate regarding the frequency and inclusion when celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Many scholars insist the frequency of the Lord’s Supper is not absolute nor addressed in Scripture. Thus, each church can decide when and how often to celebrate it. However, many other scholars insist that the frequency of the Lord’s Supper is addressed in Scripture implicitly by describing churches that celebrate it weekly and, consequently, propose emulating this practice. Similarly, many scholars

⁴⁸ Goppelt, “*Potérion*,” 155.

⁴⁹ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, 21-22.

⁵⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 335.

view all professing believers as eligible participants in the Lord's Supper, whereas others view only baptized believers as eligible participants. These are common themes that must be addressed if this thesis project is to take shape. There is a gap regarding the inclusion of a meal. The literature mostly ignores this topic, describing the Lord's Supper merely as eating bread and drinking the cup instead. Hardly any scholars argue against the meal, and those who argue that the communal meal is biblical are few in number. Therefore, this will be a primary focus in this thesis project, beginning first with the biblical and theological arguments for this view.

Theological Foundations

Scripture, especially the New Testament, is rife with descriptions of fellowship and love. To establish the precedent of fellowship and love within the church, a researcher could form an argument in an impressively diverse set of bases. The argument used here will be an argument from an example, rather than from a command. A command proves the necessity and is sufficient, but an example can demonstrate the benefits and motivation for emulating the practice and implicitly encourage emulation. Consequently, this intervention is not a practice that every church is morally obligated to emulate. There is no command to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal in the New Testament, but the practice is certainly present in New Testament. Specifically, Acts 2:42-47 provides this model of fellowship and love within the church and the benefits that naturally result. The word "devoted" in Acts 2:42 is a present participle, *proskarterountes*, which denotes a continual aspect, something they did continually and often, resulting in the church's actions in Acts 2:42-47. This assertion does raise the question though: is the church in Acts 2:42-47 worth emulating? After all, Acts 2:42-47 describes the first church devoting themselves (which implies regular activity) to studying from the apostles, fellowshiping, breaking bread, and praying, but it also describes the first church enjoying

miracles done by the apostles, having everything in common, selling their possessions to help other believers in need, and meeting daily in one another's homes for meals. Is it worthwhile for churches today to emulate these descriptive, not prescriptive, aspects? The response is twofold.

First, the onus does not lie with the one who says it is beneficial to replicate the first church. The onus lies with the one who says it is *not* beneficial to replicate the first church. How would churches not benefit if they replicated the first church's practice in Acts 2:42? This description of the first church is beneficial to replicate today, especially since, as it will be demonstrated, every description of a local church's celebration of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament describes a weekly practice. If Acts 2:42 were the only passing reference, then perhaps emulation would be reading too much out of the text. This is not the case, however, and this ties in with the second reason for considering the descriptions in Acts 2:42-47 as beneficial to emulate. There is a principle of interpreting the book of Acts. Indeed, it is a transitional book, and many details in the book are descriptive but not worth emulating. However, the way one can tell if the book of Acts is being descriptive and but not worth emulating is by comparing it with other Scriptures. For example, in the book of Acts, sometimes the Holy Spirit is imparted after conversion when an apostle lays hands on the convert. However, this is not normative because Ephesians 1:13 says, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." Ephesians 1:13 shows the normative function, that the Holy Spirit indwells a believer at the moment of conversion. Therefore, the unique stories in Acts when the Holy Spirit comes later via the laying on of hands must be descriptive, but not worth emulating. However, there are no passages in the New Testament that contradict the practice of the first church in Acts 2:42. On the contrary, the rest of the New Testament describes these practices occurring in other churches.

The ultimate question regarding Acts 2:42 and whether or not it is beneficial to implement its practices in churches today is this: What criteria are necessary to prove the behavior of the church in Acts 2:42-47 is beneficial to emulate, even though it is not commanded elsewhere? If the reader of Scripture starts with the obvious and works backward, then the answer becomes clear. In Acts 2:42, the early church is described as “devot[ing] themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” How many of these actions performed by the early church are beneficial? Are some, all, or none of them beneficial in churches today on a weekly basis? Again, it is best to start with the obvious and work from there. Everyone can agree that it is beneficial for churches to pray every week, to teach/preach the Word of God every week, and to fellowship every week. Therefore, however the New Testament describes praying, teaching/preaching, and fellowshiping within churches is the standard for considering the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 beneficial to practice weekly, even though it is not explicitly commanded. Starting with fellowship, when observing the other uses of *koinōnia* and its various forms outside of Acts 2:42, there are not many other uses.

Like many other words in Greek, *koinōnia* has multiple forms. Obviously, *koinōnia* is the lexical form of the noun that means “fellowship.” However, there is also *koinōnikos*, which is the adjectival form, and *koinōneō*, which is the lexical form of the verb and the most important form for this discussion. Interestingly, there are only two examples of *koinōneō* being used as an imperative, as a command. There are multiple examples of *koinōneō* in the indicative mood (Romans 15:27; Philippians 4:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 4:13; 2 John 1:11). There is only one example of *koinōneō* in the participial mood (Romans 12:13), and there are only two examples of *koinōneō* in the imperative mood (Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:22). It is noteworthy that neither example of *koinōneō* in the imperative mood is used to command those in a church to fellowship

with one another. Galatians 6:6 reads, “Let the one who is taught the word *share* all good things with the one who teaches” [emphasis mine]. This verse commands parishioners to *share* (*koinōneō*) all good things (particularly finances) with the one who teaches them, but this is not a command for those in a church to fellowship with one another. Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:22 says, “Do not be hasty in the laying of hands, nor *take part* in the sins of others; keep yourself pure” [emphasis mine]. Again, while the verb *koinōneō* appears here in the imperative mood, it does not command those in a church to fellowship with one another. Rather, it commands Timothy and other pastors to not participate in the sins of others. It can be said dogmatically that the Bible never once commands attendees of a church to fellowship with one another, to have *koinōnia* with one another. However, despite the lack of command to fellowship in the New Testament, it is still worthwhile to fellowship with one another on a weekly basis. It is not necessary for a church practice to be commanded in the imperative mood to be worthwhile. With this concept established, conclusions can be drawn from the other practices in Acts 2:42.

Nowhere is the church commanded to have fellowship, *koinōnia*, with one another on a weekly basis, yet everyone agrees that it is beneficial for attendees of churches to fellowship with one another. The same is true of prayer and preaching. The imperative form of the verb *kērussō* only appears a handful of times. Jesus commanded his followers to preach the gospel and to proclaim what is whispered to them in Matthew 10:7 and 10:27, but that is irrelevant to this thesis. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul commands Timothy to preach the Word of God, which corresponds to the preaching in Acts 2:42, but there is no command to preach the Word of God every week. The same is true of the imperative form of the verb *didaskō*. The disciples tell Jesus to teach them to pray in Luke 11:1, but that is irrelevant to this thesis. Paul commands Timothy to teach in 1 Timothy 4:11 and 6:2, which corresponds to the teaching in Acts 2:42, but there is

no command to teach every week either. This just leaves the imperative form of prayer.

When analyzing the imperative form of the verb *proseuchomai*, it appears frequently. However, setting aside Jesus' commands to pray personally in the Gospels, which are irrelevant to this thesis, there are still numerous commands to pray. However, none of them are explicit commands for weekly prayer as a church. Paul commands individuals to pray for an interpretation when praying in another language (1 Corinthians 14:13), without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and for him and his coworkers (1 Thessalonians 5:25), specifically that their preaching would be fruitful (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The author of Hebrews commands individuals to pray for their leaders (Hebrews 13:18). James commands individuals to pray when they suffer (James 5:13) and for elders to pray over the one whom suffers (James 5:14), but no one commands for prayer on a weekly basis as a church. Therefore, the standard for whether or not a practice in Acts 2:42 would be beneficial and biblical on a weekly basis in churches today cannot be the presence of a command to do the practice weekly elsewhere in the New Testament. Otherwise, prayer, preaching/teaching, and fellowship are not necessarily beneficial, biblical practices in the church on a weekly basis. This lends credence to the benefits to the celebrating of the Lord's Supper every week since it is referenced in Acts 2:42 as well.

Regarding "the breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42, this section of this thesis project will demonstrate that this phrase refers to the Lord's Supper. Elsewhere in Scripture, such as Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, which will also be discussed shortly, the Lord's Supper is implied to have been celebrated weekly. To summarize, the same criteria for praying, preaching/teaching, and fellowshiping weekly as a church in the New Testament is present for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in the New Testament as well. Therefore, churches, including Garden City Bible Fellowship, could benefit by implementing this biblical practice

weekly, even if they are not commanded to do so. It would appear churches can benefit by emulating the church in Jerusalem described in Acts 2:42-47 to the best of their abilities, especially regarding fellowship and the Lord's Supper.

Acts 2:42-47

The first description of the first church is in Acts 2:42, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." F. F. Bruce correctly considers the subsequent two descriptions, "the breaking of bread and the prayers," as specifications on how the early church devoted themselves to fellowship.⁵¹ It will eventually be demonstrated that "the breaking of bread" refers to the Lord's Supper.⁵² Moreover, it will be seen that breaking bread also includes a meal in which the church participated, and this meal, like any meal, is a catalyst for building fellowship and love for all who participate correctly, especially in a church where there is an assumed, fundamental agreement between one another.⁵³ After all, a communal meal naturally promotes appreciation for one another in the church and a sense of sharing among the participants.⁵⁴ The word "sharing" is the key to building fellowship due to its definition in Greek. The word translated as "fellowship" in Acts 2:42 is the aforementioned *koinōnia*, and it communicates the idea of sharing in the midst of, as John Polhill says, a "close relationship."⁵⁵ By this point, it should be self-evident how this verse pertains to

⁵¹ F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 73.

⁵² Behm, "Artos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume I*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 477.

⁵³ Kostarelos, *Feeling the Spirit*, 91.

⁵⁴ Smith and Pattison, *Slow Church*, 202.

⁵⁵ John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2001), 119.

this thesis project. Close relationships and sharing are exactly what are missing at Garden City Bible Fellowship, which is why Garden City Bible Fellowship does not look like the Jerusalem church described in the rest of Acts 2, particularly Acts 2:44-47.

Acts 2:44 says, “all who believed were together and had all things in common.” Again, the word translated as “common” is the Greek word *koina*, a derivative of the aforementioned *koinōnia*, and this commonality extended all the way down to possessions in Acts 2:45, “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” This description is far removed from Garden City Bible Fellowship, where some members are not even aware of the needs of others in the church, let alone selling a car or a house to provide for those needs. They do not even want to spend their time and money to make a meal for one another to eat during the Lord’s Supper after the Sunday gathering, let alone during the week at each other’s homes as described in Acts 2:46. These are biblical examples of fellowship, which are conspicuously missing at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Fellowship has been at the center of the church to this point in Acts 2, and this trend continues.

It is at this point another word pertaining to fellowship appears in Acts 2:46-47, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” By translating the Greek word *homothymadon* as “together,” the English Standard Version leaves much to be desired. John Polhill defines this word, which appears over a half-dozen times in Acts alone, as: “unity of purpose” and “one heart and mind.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the early church unified intellectually (“mind”), emotionally (“heart”), and volitionally (“purpose”). Only when this fellowship and love was in

⁵⁶ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 121.

place could they see the results described in Acts 2:42-47.⁵⁷ This is the fellowship that every church, not only Garden City Bible Fellowship in Roanoke, can benefit from. How can a church obtain this fellowship corporately? F. F. Bruce, John Polhill, as well as the sources cited previously provide one answer (that is probably already self-evident). The “fellowship” found in Acts 2:42 is a result of “the breaking of bread and the prayers,” which are effectual causes.⁵⁸ If Garden City Bible Fellowship emulates the first church’s fellowship during the Sunday gathering in Acts 2:42 every week (which will be demonstrated as the common practice in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:20-21), then they theoretically would also begin to emulate the first church’s continual love for one another as described in Acts 2:43-47. Garden City Bible Fellowship already studies the teachings of the apostles and prays together at length every single week. However, they are not breaking bread together every week, unlike the church in Acts 2:42, which negatively affects fellowship. Therefore, “break bread” must be defined, beginning in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and Acts 2:42, which both equate the Lord’s Supper with the bread.

1 Corinthians 10:16

“The breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 refers to the Lord’s Supper.⁵⁹ The basis for this assertion is a parallel passage. Thomas Schreiner makes an apt observation when he says, “Paul mentions the Lord’s Supper only twice (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34), but this should not be interpreted to say that its as insignificant in Paul’s thought.”⁶⁰ This fact necessitates interpreting

⁵⁷ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 121-122.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 778.

⁶⁰ Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 575.

1 Corinthians 10:16, which says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” The meaning of “the cup” and “the bread” here is plain. The Lord’s Supper is in view here. The aforementioned *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* sees the Lord’s Supper as the culmination of both fellowship with Christ and with other believers who likewise participate.⁶¹ This is reflected in the phrase, “the bread and the cup,” another way to refer to the Lord’s Supper biblically, because just as bread and drink are necessary for life, so too is fellowship with Jesus Christ necessary for spiritual life, which is signified by the bread and the cup.⁶² Therefore, Jesus has established unity, participation, friendship, and sharing between the church and himself, and he has given the church the ability to have that same unity, participation, friendship, and sharing with one another in the form of the Lord’s Supper. Therefore, it is evident that “the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 refers to the Lord’s Supper, and this conclusion is generally agreed upon in scholarship given the clear correlation in Paul’s mind in 1 Corinthians 10:16.⁶³ Likewise, they agree that the Lord’s Supper is a means of fellowship with Christ.⁶⁴ The aspect on which there is a lack of agreement among commentators is the frequency and content of the Lord’s Supper.

Acts 2:42

The blessing of the cup and the breaking of the bread in 1 Corinthians 10:16 clearly refer to the Lord’s Supper, and it is the same bread being broken in Acts 2:42.⁶⁵ Therefore, when Acts

⁶¹ Hauck, “*koinōnia*,” 804-805.

⁶² Goppelt, “*Potērion*,” 156.

⁶³ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 121.

⁶⁴ Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 131.

⁶⁵ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

2:42 states that the first church in Jerusalem devoted themselves to fellowship by prayer and the breaking of bread, the author of Acts must be asserting that the first, early church devoted themselves to fellowship by prayer and celebrating the Lord's Supper.⁶⁶ Behm asserts that the "breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 cannot refer to the Lord's Supper because "breaking of bread" is also used in Acts 2:46 in a way that does not refer to the Lord's Supper.⁶⁷ However, this assertion is the minority interpretation in the literature, and it will be proven that there is a fundamental difference between "the breaking of bread" in Acts 2:42 and the phrase in Acts 2:46 that Behm misses. Consequently, he wrongly correlates the word "bread" in these two verses.

Regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper, the proposed model stems from inferred reasoning. In Acts 2:42, the four activities to which the early church devoted themselves were "the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." There is no debate regarding the frequency of studying the apostles' teaching, fellowshiping, and praying as a church. Every church preaches from the Scriptures, gathers, and prays weekly. Therefore, it is logical and beneficial for churches to break bread weekly as well, even though they are not commanded elsewhere to do this. This concept is verified by the fact that the early church "devoted themselves" to these practices. These activities were not opinions or activities carried out as per convenience. On the contrary, they were activities that the church intentionally made an effort to perform.⁶⁸ That is why John Calvin concluded, "Therefore, we ought always to provide that no meeting of the church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms."⁶⁹ Calvin's conclusion, while stronger than this author's conclusion since he

⁶⁶ Bruce, *The International Commentary on the New Testament: Acts*, 73.

⁶⁷ Behm, "Kláo," 438.

⁶⁸ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 929.

used the word “ought” as an imperative, is the result of logical inference. However, logical inference is a perfectly valid way to interpret Scripture. T. David Gordon agrees with the usage of inference to establish biblical truth and practice, and to support this point he cites the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture’ (WCF 1.6).”⁷⁰ Vital doctrines, such as the Trinity, are deduced from inference, and the same methodology that causes Christians to believe in the triunity of God can also cause Christians to practice the Lord’s Supper weekly.

At this point, it is noteworthy that some, such as Jonathan Edwards, extend this inference even further by concluding that the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper daily. Edwards bases this inferential conclusion on Acts 2:46, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”⁷¹ Even the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* sees both Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46 as references to the daily Lord’s Supper.⁷² However, this inference is flawed, though it is easy to understand how Edwards and Behm make this incorrect conclusion. In Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46, both verses refer to breaking bread. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that both refer to the Lord’s Supper if one of them refers to the Lord’s Supper. Unfortunately, there is a demonstrable and substantial linguistic difference between the two verses that is not reflected in any English translation at this time. The major difference between the two references to “breaking bread” is

⁷⁰ Gordon, “Why Weekly Communion?”

⁷¹ Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17*, 264.

⁷² Behm, “*Artos*,” 477.

the presence, or lack thereof, of the article in Greek. One leading Greek scholar, Daniel Wallace, reflects on the Greek article in this way, “[The Greek article’s] original force was to *point out* something. It has largely kept the force of drawing attention to something” [emphasis his].⁷³ The word “the” in English might seem secondary and unexciting, but the opposite could not be truer in Greek. As quoted by Daniel Wallace, “As Robertson pointed out, ‘The article is never meaningless in Greek, though it often fails to correspond with the English idiom. ... Its free use leads to exactness and finesse.’”⁷⁴ Therefore, this difference between Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46 regarding the article must be examined further.

There are passages that describe the Lord’s Supper’s bread without the article, but these references are found in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper in Matthew 26:26 and its parallel passages in Mark 14:22 and Luke 22:19, where Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. However, bread would have been broken multiple times during this meal, just as a cup would have been passed multiple times during this meal.⁷⁵ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Gospels do not include the article when they say that Jesus broke the bread of the Lord’s Supper. What is surprising is the inclusion of the article before the word “bread” in Luke 24:30, which says Jesus “took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” At first glance, it does not appear that this was a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. However, it did take place on a Sunday since Luke 24:1 begins by saying, “on the first day of the week,” and since Jesus’ interaction with the disciples on the road to Emmaus began on “that very day” according to Luke 24:13. Therefore, this breaking of bread did take place on a Sunday, and it

⁷³ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 94.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 787.

was a leader (*the* Leader) of the church who administered the bread. In Luke 24, Jesus administered the bread, though the disciples had no clue it was Jesus at the moment and, instead, thought that Jesus was dead. This is a very interesting conundrum, whether or not the Lord's Supper is in view in Luke 24, and it warrants further study.

Regardless of one's view of Luke 24 and the presence of the article before the word "bread" during a meal that very well could have been a common meal, rather than the Lord's Supper, this does not explain why Luke would only include the article in Acts 2:42 but not in Acts 2:46. The same can be concluded about Acts 20:7 and 20:11. It does not explain the presence and absence of the article in Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46, respectively. Furthermore, Acts 2:42 and 20:7 validate this thesis either way in any case. Either the church gathered on Sunday to break *the* bread of the Lord's Supper, or the church gathered to break regular bread, referring to a communal meal. Regardless of the bread's referent, these verses support this thesis. Regarding Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46 and the article, however, the observation remains. One is anarthrous, while the other is articular. This is an intentional choice by Luke since they occur so closely together. Consequently, any difference between Acts 2:42 and Acts 2:46 regarding the presence or absence of the article should not be disregarded as inconsequential.

It appears Luke intended to communicate something different in Acts 2:42 compared to Acts 2:46. Otherwise, he would have either included the article in both verses or excluded the article from both. Instead, he says the early church "devoted themselves to ... the breaking of *the* bread" [translation and emphasis mine]. By including the article here, Luke intends his reader to recognize the specificity, the uniqueness of this bread. Daniel Wallace summarizes this conclusion well when he makes this conclusion in light of the presence of the article in Acts 2:42, "Either this pattern of worship was well known in the early church because it was the

common manner in which it was done, or Luke was attempting to convey that each element of the worship was the only one deserving the name (*par excellence*)” [emphasis his].⁷⁶ Obviously, as proven before, this bread refers to the bread of the Lord’s Supper, a truly specific and unique bread indeed.⁷⁷ However, in Acts 2:46, the article is missing, rendering the phrase “and breaking bread in their homes,” which is an accurate translation. The difference cannot be overstated. Acts 2:42 states that the early church devoted themselves to celebrating the Lord’s Supper together whenever they gathered corporately, whereas Acts 2:46 says the early church gathered daily in one another’s houses to eat meals together. However, these meals were not sacramental, but rather voluntary acts of hospitality and love. Therefore, contrary to Edwards, Acts 2:46 does not posit that churches should celebrate the Lord’s Supper daily, and contrary to Behm, Acts 2:46 does not prove that Acts 2:42 is not referring to the Lord’s Supper. In fact, Acts 2:46 implies Christians should meet with one another daily in a voluntary manner, but that is another topic. This leaves the reader to sympathize with John Tillotson, “[the early church] judged [the Lord’s Supper] as essential and necessary a part of their publick worship, as any other part of it whatsoever, even as their hymns and prayers, and reading and interpreting the Word of God.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper at every gathering is established in the first chapter about the new covenant church alongside practices that every church participates in weekly: prayer, fellowship, and teaching.⁷⁹ Traditionally, the frequency of these gatherings might seem obvious, but the roots of gathering on Sunday to worship and—significant

⁷⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 225.

⁷⁷ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts*, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1972), 34.

⁷⁸ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, 26.

⁷⁹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12*, (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 82-85.

to this topic—to celebrate the Lord’s Supper are purely biblical and stem from Acts 20:7.

Acts 20:7

In Acts 20, Paul is on one of his vaunted missionary journeys. However, he takes a brief respite in the city of Troas according to Acts 20:5-6, “These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.” One might wonder why he makes such a long detour, especially since the text describes no sermons or missionary endeavors. The only act of Paul included in this passage is Paul’s gathering with believers “On the first day of the week,” which introduces Acts 20:7.

It is safe to assume that “on the first day of the week” refers to Sunday for two reasons. First, Acts 20:7 says Paul intended “to depart on the next day.” That language does not make sense if he was reckoning days in the Jewish, lunar way, since “the next day” would refer to at dusk, rather than in the morning. Thus, it is best to see “the first day of the week” as referring to Sunday morning, not Saturday evening.⁸⁰ Second, Luke’s audience is a Gentile named “Theophilus” according to Acts 1:1. A Gentile would consider Sunday the first day of the week, as opposed to Saturday evening in the Jewish mindset. This sets the precedent for the church gathering on Sunday, and this verse also sets the precedent for celebrating the Lord’s Supper or a communal meal (or both) weekly.⁸¹ Acts 20:7 reads, “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.” Like Acts 2:42, the common elements of the corporate Christian gathering include the teaching of the apostle Paul and the breaking of bread.

⁸⁰ Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome*, 156.

⁸¹ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord’s Supper*, 101.

It is noteworthy why the church gathered together though.

Luke says, “we were gathered together to break bread.” This reference to breaking bread might refer to the non-ceremonial breaking of bread in the form of a communal meal since the article is not present. It could also refer to the Lord’s Supper in light of Acts 20:11. Most probably, considering the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 to follow, Acts 20:7 is referring to both the Lord’s Supper’s bread and a meal’s bread.⁸² Regardless, as seen before, Acts 20:7 supports the concept of gathering weekly to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and/or a communal meal, with many scholars agreeing that this at least refers to the Lord’s Supper. One example is Gordon, whose attention was piqued by Acts 20:7 to such an extent that it caused him to state, “Today, we might refer to our Sunday gatherings as gatherings ‘to hear the Word of God,’ or, possibly, ‘to pray,’ but I doubt we would describe our gatherings as Luke describes this. The implication is ... that the Lord’s Supper so *characterized* their assembly that it could accurately be designated as a gathering ‘to break bread’”⁸³ [emphasis his]. It is true; the early church gathered to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as a major purpose, demonstrating the biblical nature of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly, especially since Paul went out of his way to be present for this gathering to participate in the Lord’s Supper and/or a communal meal.

There are three explanations for why and how Paul went out of his way to celebrate the Lord’s Supper with the church in Troas. First, this church might have celebrated the Lord’s Supper irregularly, and Paul coincidentally happened to be present during one of these infrequent celebrations. However, this is unlikely and dependent upon coincidence. Second, this church might have planned a last-minute Lord’s Supper due to Paul’s presence. This is possible, but

⁸² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13-28*, (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 203.

⁸³ Gordon, “Why Weekly Communion?”

speculative and less convincing compared to the third possibility. Third, this church might have celebrated the Lord's Supper every week, and Paul knew this since it was true of all the churches he planted, including the church in Troas. In light of Acts 2:42 and the fact that the church "gathered together to break bread," this is the best interpretation, though it is necessary to recognize again that this is an observation of description, not a prescribed command. It is noteworthy that Acts 20:11 describes Paul's final experience with this church, "when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed." Luke puts the verb "eaten" in conjunction with "broken bread." Most importantly, the article is present before "bread" here, indicating this bread is likely the bread of the Lord's Supper regardless of one's interpretation of Acts 20:7. This verse also suggests that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper did not occur in a vacuum by themselves, but rather in the context of a meal.⁸⁴ This is another debatable aspect of the Lord's Supper: the context. In the early church, it appears the Lord's Supper occurred in the context of a meal.⁸⁵ While Luke hints at this aspect of the Lord's Supper, Paul expands upon this to a great extent even when rebuking a wayward church in his famed first letter to the Corinthians in chapter eleven.⁸⁶

1 Corinthians 11:20-21

It might seem odd to establish the frequency and context of the Lord's Supper from a rebuke, but failures are often the best teachers. This was certainly true of the church in Corinth. It is evident that the Lord's Supper includes eating bread and drinking wine (or grape juice for those opposed to alcohol). Paul affirms this in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 where he reaffirms the

⁸⁴ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 418.

⁸⁵ Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Acts*, 384.

⁸⁶ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 418.

institution of the Lord's Supper during the Last Supper by Jesus the night before he was crucified. However, Paul also speaks of the Lord's Supper as if it also included an entire meal, and he glosses past this fact so quickly that it is easy to miss.⁸⁷ In his rebuke of the Corinthian church for how they celebrated the Lord's Supper, Paul begins in 1 Corinthians 11:20 by saying, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." By this, Paul is implying that the Corinthian church thought that they were, in fact, celebrating the Lord's Supper, but he is insisting that they actually are not celebrating the Lord's Supper because they are celebrating it incorrectly. What was their crime that invalidated their Lord's Suppers? According to 1 Corinthians 11:21, "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk." Again, this verse comes and goes so quickly that its implications are easily overlooked without a second thought. Two of those implications are the inclusion of a meal with the Lord's Supper and its weekly occurrence at the regular gathering every Sunday.

The first clue in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 that the Corinthian church celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly is the phrase "When you come together." This participle is a form of the Greek verb *sunerchomai*, and Paul uses it specifically and often. He uses it five times in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 alone while discussing the Lord's Supper. However, he also uses it twice later in 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 14:26. 1 Corinthians 14:23 reads, "If, therefore, the whole church *comes together*, and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?" [emphasis mine]. This hypothetical scenario could happen any Sunday when the church gathered. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 14:26 says, "What then, brothers? When you *come together*, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" [emphasis mine]. This is another

⁸⁷ Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible: Matthew to Revelation*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 115.

description of what happened in the Corinthian church every single week on Sunday. When they came together every week, it was chaos. When they came together every week on Sunday, if a non-believer were present, then he or she would think the Corinthian believers were out of their minds. Both statements use the verb *sunermchomai* to convey that the action occurred when the Corinthian church gathered on any given Sunday. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the wrongful celebration of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 did occur weekly as well.⁸⁸ Not only did it occur weekly, but it also occurred in tandem with a meal.

It is impossible to explain the sin committed by the Corinthian church during the Lord's Supper without a meal.⁸⁹ Participating in a meal during a religious gathering, pagan or otherwise, was not odd in the first century, and this religious meal in the context of the Christian gathering is the only scenario that allows Paul to condemn the Corinthian church for their gluttony and exclusivity.⁹⁰ Apparently, the rich Corinthian Christians brought their own food (and lots of it) and segregated themselves off from the poor Corinthian Christians, resulting in a segregated meal.⁹¹ If there was not a meal in this church, and if the Lord's Supper consisted only of a wafer and a tiny cup of wine, then how could the Corinthian believers have possibly abused the Lord's Supper in the way Paul described?⁹² The only explanation is the inclusion of a meal with the Lord's Supper, and not just with one Lord's Supper, but every Lord's Supper. After all, Paul said

⁸⁸ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

⁸⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries*, 3rd ed., (Abilene, TX: ACU, 1999), Kindle.

⁹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 588.

⁹¹ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 132.

⁹² H. Preisker, "Méthē," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, & Gerhard Kittel, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 576.

they abused the Lord's Supper when they would "come together" on any given Sunday. Paul's primary concerns when rebuking the Corinthian church's wrongful celebration of the Lord's Supper betray his priorities and what the Lord's Supper is meant to accomplish.

As a religious meal, the Lord's Supper is intended to bring about unity and fellowship. Paul already established these priorities in the preceding chapter in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." Here, Paul establishes his two priorities, fellowship and unity, and their two directions, toward God and toward one another. When believers partake of the bread and the cup, they remember during the Lord's Supper what Jesus Christ did on the cross to save the believers, and it brought them into union and fellowship with him experientially. Furthermore, because the partaker of the bread and the cup is doing so alongside other believers, who have all gathered for the same purpose with the same beliefs, all the participants should be drawn together in fellowship, unity, and love.⁹³ Therefore, fellowship, unity, and love with Christ results in fellowship, unity, and love with believers. The necessity of this unity cannot be understated, as Valeriy Alikin observes in her commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, "The purpose of the communion meal, among other aims, was to realize the communion (fellowship, solidarity [unity], and brotherhood [love]) between the members of the congregation."⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 provides the background to Paul's rebuke in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, particularly 11:20-21, where he rebukes the believers in Corinth for nullifying the purposes of building fellowship, unity, and love in the Lord's Supper and its

⁹³ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, xvii.

⁹⁴ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 104-105.

accompanying meal by their behavior.

Given the spiritual significance of the Lord's Supper, the abuses described in 1 Corinthians 11:21 are even more heinous. The purpose is unity, but the Corinthian church divided itself by some eating too much while others ate nothing. This is a clear violation of the intention of the Lord's Supper in relation to one another, and this results in a violation of the Lord's Supper in relation to Jesus Christ to the point that Paul will not refer to what the Corinthian believers were doing as "the Lord's Supper." The intended fellowship and love was nowhere to be seen. However, once the Corinthian believers amended their practice, they would partake of the same benefits of which Garden City Bible Fellowship would partake, as described by Alikin, "to feed the participants and bring about their unity with the risen Lord, as well as the community among themselves."⁹⁵ Fellowship with Christ over the Lord's Supper and its meal results in fellowship with one another.⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that the meal described in 1 Corinthians 11:21 is a *deipnon*, translated as "meal" in the English Standard Version. The word conveys more than just any meal eaten during the day, but rather refers to the supper in the evening.⁹⁷ Another name for this *deipnon* is the *agapē*⁹⁸ or "love feast," a phrase found only once in the New Testament in a seemingly obscure statement in Jude 12.⁹⁹ John MacArthur rightly correlates the meal in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 and the love feast in Jude 12, "In the early church the love feast and Communion customarily were held together, but abuses such as those in Corinth

⁹⁵ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 108.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 108.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 104-105.

⁹⁸ Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 588.

⁹⁹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, revised edition, (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 116.

eventually forced the two to be separated in order to protect the Communion. The love feast soon disappeared altogether.”¹⁰⁰ While his conclusion that the love feast disappeared in order to protect the Lord’s Supper is speculation, what is not speculation is the correlation between the meal that accompanied the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 and the love feast in Jude 12.

Jude 12

While the phrase “love feast” only appears in Jude 12, its meaning and significance become clear in light of the preceding interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:20-21. It is telling that a pastor who does not advocate for regular communal meals with the Lord’s Supper, John MacArthur, equates the abused meal in 1 Corinthians 11 with the love feast in Jude.¹⁰¹ The earliest churches participated in a meal when they celebrated the Lord’s Supper, and the purpose was to build fellowship, unity, and love with Christ and with one another. It should be self-evident by now that this is actually a full meal, but lest there was any doubt, Jude uses the word *suneuōcheō* in verse 12, which means “to feast sumptuously with” according to Wuest.¹⁰² That action would be impossible without the presence of a full meal in which the church participates. In light of this, a simple way to refer to this meal would be “love feast” as found in Jude 12. It would be difficult to find a better demonstration of love than a church celebrating the Lord’s Supper, including a meal, correctly.¹⁰³ It is here that the two problems at Garden City Bible

¹⁰⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 269.

¹⁰¹ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 286-287.

¹⁰² Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader: Volume Two*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 249.

¹⁰³ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 786.

Fellowship—a lack of love and a lack of fellowship—intersect. The Lord’s Supper and the accompanying love feast address both problems and uniquely build both love and fellowship at the same time. This name for the meal reveals the true root for fellowship. Indeed, fellowship with one another as a church stems from fellowship with Christ, but where does that fellowship stem from? The answer must be love, first for Christ and then for one another and finally for oneself.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the meal itself is called the “love feast” shows where the true source of love and fellowship lies. It is not primarily in the bread and the cup, which are integral to the Lord’s Supper according to the Synoptic Gospels, but rather the meal that makes the Lord’s Supper so full of love and a catalyst for fellowship. Only in conjunction with the love feast did the church come together to partake of the bread and the cup, because these two practices go hand-in-hand to build fellowship and love with Jesus Christ and with one another.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, some have attempted to divide the love feast and the Lord’s Supper in church history.

Valeriy Alikin laments the unnecessary disjunction imposed between the Lord’s Supper and the love feast. She recounts how scholars, especially in the past century, insisted that the love feast and the Lord’s Supper were separate events, even if the Lord’s Supper did include its own meal.¹⁰⁶ Their rationale is the lack of sacramental language found in Jude 12. There is no mention of Jesus’s body or blood, nor of the bread and the cup. There is no mention of partaking of the meal in remembrance of Jesus. There is no mention of fellowship or unity with Jesus or one another as well. Therefore, they refuse to correlate the two. However, Alikin rejects this

¹⁰⁴ Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 460-461.

¹⁰⁵ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, 21-22.

¹⁰⁶ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 12, 16.

logic on the basis of church history. The early church did not have multiple meals together, but rather one in conjunction with the Lord's Supper. For example, the *Didache*, written very early in the history of the church, and Ignatius's *Letter to the Ephesians*, written in the early second century, both use sacramental and common language interchangeably. Both the *Didache* and the *Letter to the Ephesians* refer to the Eucharist, the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, and a communal meal and the content interchangeably. Therefore, there is no reason to force a distinction between the Lord's Supper and the love feast when all the other titles in church history refer to the same meal.¹⁰⁷ While this argument is admittedly outside Scripture, the historical argument cannot be ignored. The earliest churches celebrated the Lord's Supper every week, and it was always accompanied by a meal in Scripture. Even John MacArthur, a pastor who does not advocate for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal, describes the love feast in this way, "The feast was similar to a contemporary potluck dinner held on the Lord's Day. Believers would gather to worship, hear the teaching of Scripture, celebrate Communion [the Lord's Supper], and then share their common love in a meal (cf. Acts 2:42)."¹⁰⁸ Not coincidentally, John MacArthur just described this thesis project in his summary of the love feast. It is a meal that accompanies the Lord's Supper. This conclusion is understandable when one considers the origin of the Lord's Supper.

The Synoptic Gospels

By "Synoptic Gospels," Matthew, Mark, and Luke are in view because of how similar they are in contradistinction to John, whose Gospel includes many differences, including the

¹⁰⁷ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

¹⁰⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Peter & Jude*, (Chicago: Moody, 2005), 12b.

institution of the Lord's Supper.¹⁰⁹ Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-20 describe how Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal.¹¹⁰ Even John, the non-Synoptic Gospel, describes how Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal.¹¹¹ Specifically, the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of the Passover meal.¹¹² It is important to note exactly what surrounded Jesus's command to eat the bread and drink the cup to remember him. First, the meal occurred in a celebratory and jovial context, rather than a somber context, by beginning with prayers of praise.¹¹³ Next, according to John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, "During a traditional Passover meal, four cups of wine would be passed around the table."¹¹⁴ Jesus said he would not drink of the vine in Luke 22:17-18 after drinking the first cup of the Passover.¹¹⁵ It was only after the second cup had gone around that the bread similarly went around to each participant to eat. Jesus continued the theme of happiness by giving thanks before passing the bread.¹¹⁶ One of the reasons why the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist is due to the Greek verb for giving thanks, *eucharisteō*, which again is what Jesus did before passing the bread.¹¹⁷ It was during this time that Jesus commanded his followers to eat the bread of his body

¹⁰⁹ D. A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 257.

¹¹⁰ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

¹¹¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 62.

¹¹² Wallace, "The Lord's Supper," 704.

¹¹³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16*, (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 285.

¹¹⁴ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 787.

¹¹⁵ Goppelt, "*Potérion*," 154.

¹¹⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke 18-24*, (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 280.

¹¹⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28*, (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 151.

to remember him. Therefore, Jesus commanded his followers to drink the cup of his blood to remember him when the third or fourth cup went around.¹¹⁸ It was probably the third since there had to be time to eat more of the meal after Jesus washed the disciples' feet according to John.¹¹⁹ The Synoptic Gospels list the cup second to the bread, and they tell extraordinarily similar accounts of what happened in the Upper Room during the Last Supper.¹²⁰ This fact alone would be sufficient to demonstrate the inclusion of the meal during the Lord's Supper. After all, the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of a meal. However, there is another proof that spans throughout the Scriptures.

When God ratified the two covenants (*diathēkē* in Greek) in Scripture, the old and the new covenants, he did so in the context of a communal meal and the shedding of blood during a sacrifice.¹²¹ When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he also instituted the new covenant in the context of his bloody sacrifice. His binding words can be found in Luke 22:20b, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Time is not sufficient to explain what the new covenant is or its relationship and superiority to the old covenant, but it is sufficient to observe that Jesus established the new covenant in the context of a meal, the Last Supper, from which the Lord's Supper continues to celebrate the new covenant. However, one must not forget that God also established the old covenant in the context of a meal. After giving the Ten Commandments and other sundry commands, the Israelites agreed to this covenant with God. What did God do then to ratify the covenant? According to Exodus 24:11, "he did not lay his

¹¹⁸ Goppelt, "*Potérion*," 154.

¹¹⁹ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John*, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1974), 164.

¹²⁰ Wallace, "Lord's Supper," 704.

¹²¹ Charles L. Quarles, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Matthew*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger & Robert W. Yarbrough, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 315-316.

hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.” God ratified the old covenant, like the new covenant, with a meal in which those who are a part of the covenant participated. What is the point? Covenants and meals go together, and if the Lord’s Supper is a commemoration of the new covenant (and it is according to the Synoptic Gospels), then a meal should be included in which all who are participants in the new covenant should be included.

To summarize, Acts 2:42 strongly implies that the earliest church practiced the Lord’s Supper every week along with fellowshiping, praying, and learning the Scriptures from the apostles. Similarly, Acts 20:11 strongly implies that the earliest church practiced the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, and Acts 20:7 also suggests that a meal was included as a main purpose for gathering together. The inclusion of this meal is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, in which Paul rebukes the Corinthian believers for excluding one another and eating a gratuitous amount of food at the expense of the poor in the church while attempting to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This sin can only be committed if the earliest churches included a meal with the Lord’s Supper, and this sin violates the purpose of this sacrament. According to 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, God intends the Lord’s Supper to build unity and fellowship with Jesus Christ, which also causes all who participate in the Lord’s Supper correctly to have unity and fellowship with one another in that moment.¹²² This meal also goes by the name “love feast,” which communicates the foundational love that underscores the entire event, and the Synoptic Gospels describe how Jesus established the new covenant and the Lord’s Supper in the context of the Passover meal, further proving the benefit of including a communal meal with the Lord’s Supper.

This specific cause of fellowship (celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly with a meal)

¹²² Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 575.

would theoretically succeed in every church for all time, including Garden City Bible Fellowship. While churches can experience fellowship from multiple causes, the Lord's Supper with a meal is the ordinance that is specifically associated with this fellowship and love. Consequently, John Calvin describes the benefit to a church this way: "All Christians might have it in frequent use, and frequently call to mind the sufferings of Christ, thereby sustaining and confirming their faith: ... cherishing and testifying toward each other that mutual charity, the bond of which they see in the unity of the body of Christ."¹²³ The theological foundation for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly alongside a communal meal is exactly that, a foundation that firmly establishes this practice. Other researchers and ministries have adopted this practice as well, though not in the exact same manner as this thesis project.

Theoretical Foundation

The discussion in the research and church communities regarding the theoretical implementation of celebrating the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis is neither new nor extensive. There have been various implementations of this practice in various contexts. However, one aspect of this thesis that appears nowhere in previous research is the weekly communal meal. In fact, there are no official practitioners of a weekly communal meal. There is no way, to this writer's knowledge, for someone to efficiently find a church that enjoys a communal meal weekly. Word of mouth appears to be the only method of finding such a church. This aspect of this thesis project makes it unique, because while there are various theoretical implementations of the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis in churches and past research, they do not include the communal meal. Nevertheless, it is still beneficial and necessary to observe how researchers and churches have implemented the bread and the cup on a weekly basis.

¹²³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 929.

Past Research

There are three noteworthy thesis projects that pertain, at least in part, to the subject of this thesis project. Their theories primarily overlap in their view of the Lord's Supper as a gift from God for the benefit of those participating and their methodology of testing that theory. One thesis is "Christ's Gift of Congregational Life in the Mystery of Holy Communion" by Gabriel Akinbode. The hypothesis that governed his research is that the Lord's Supper is one of the primary means of experiencing the "blessing" and "gifts" of God as a church and, therefore, should be celebrated weekly.¹²⁴ To this end, his thesis generally proved his theory to be true. In the introductory survey, twenty-eight percent of the participants initially agreed that the Lord's Supper satisfies their spiritual needs. However, in the conclusory survey, a whopping one hundred percent of participants agreed that the Lord's Supper satisfies their spiritual needs, clearly confirming his theory.¹²⁵ However, despite the clear increase in spiritual satisfaction via the Lord's Supper, there was not a significant increase in the desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. Initially, fifty-five percent agreed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated more frequently than monthly, and twenty-eight percent insisted that it should not be celebrated more frequently than monthly. Ultimately, only fifty-nine percent agreed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated more frequently than monthly, and participants who believe that the Lord's Supper should not be celebrated more frequently than monthly increased to thirty percent.¹²⁶ Therefore, only half of his theory was confirmed. Perhaps there was something missing in their weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps this gap that would encourage a church to

¹²⁴ Gabriel O. Akinbode, "Christ's Gift of Congregational Life in the Mystery of Holy Communion," DMin thesis, Drew University, Madison, 2013, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global, i.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 90.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 91.

celebrate the Lord's Supper more often than monthly is the weekly communal meal in conjunction with the Lord's Supper, which was not present in this thesis or any other thesis dedicated toward the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is just one of the many similarities and differences between Gabriel Akinbode's thesis and this thesis.

On a contextual level, Akinbode's context is not dissimilar from the context at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Both churches are smaller and traditional, not willing to change how they have celebrated the Lord's Supper in the past.¹²⁷ However, there are noteworthy differences. Akinbode's church is a Methodist church, where as Garden City Bible Fellowship is a non-denominational church.¹²⁸ Moreover, and this is perhaps the most important observation concerning the pre-intervention state of Akinbode's context, his congregation was already celebrating the Lord's Supper on a monthly basis, as opposed to the quarterly basis at Garden City Bible Fellowship.¹²⁹ This is significant because it is a less drastic change to celebrate the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis in Akinbode's context as opposed to this context. On a methodological level, both theses require the recruitment of volunteers to implement the intervention.¹³⁰ This methodological similarity between theses continued in the form of research.

Most importantly, on a research level, the research methodology of Akinbode's thesis and this thesis are similar. The primary means through which Akinbode conducted his research was introductory and conclusory surveys, which is similar to the research methodology in this thesis project.¹³¹ However, Akinbode did include six small groups that studied the subject of the Lord's

¹²⁷ Akinbode, "Christ's Gift of Congregational Life in the Mystery of Holy Communion," 9.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹³¹ Ibid., 98.

Supper on a weekly basis.¹³² Similarly, he also conducted interviews with a few participants.¹³³ Furthermore, Akinbode also preached seven sermons on the subject of the Lord's Supper on the same seven weeks where his church celebrated the Lord's Supper for his project.¹³⁴ As laid out further in this thesis, this thesis will not include small groups or interviews, and there will be only one sermon on the Lord's Supper preceding the first celebration of the Lord's Supper together and not seven sermons. Akinbode's thesis also had a different focus and a different theory to test. His theory focused primarily on the individual and how he or she would draw closer to God via the Lord's Supper. The theory of this thesis project focuses primarily on the community and how they draw closer to one another as they draw closer to God via the Lord's Supper as well as a communal meal. This difference is based on the aforementioned theological foundation, which is not found in Akinbode's thesis. There is no robust defense for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly nor, obviously, including a communal meal in his thesis. In fact, there are no theological defenses in any of the other research projects.

Another research project that overlaps with this thesis project is Wilson Jones's "Sunday Dinner with Jesus." His project is founded on the benefits that his relationship with Jesus is experienced by celebrating the Lord's Supper, prompting him to want to celebrate it more often in his context.¹³⁵ Similar to Akinbode's thesis, this thesis focuses primarily on the benefits experienced by the individual with Christ and not the community with one another when celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. Once again, it does not include a communal meal.

¹³² Akinbode, "Christ's Gift of Congregational Life in the Mystery of Holy Communion," i.

¹³³ Ibid., 98-104.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 81.

¹³⁵ Wilson Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus: Toward a More Sacramental Spirituality," DMin thesis, Drew University, Madison, 2014, ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global, 7.

Nevertheless, despite not being a focus of his thesis, the communal benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly appeared in the surveys. There was a twenty-eight percent increase in the participants who agreed that the Lord's Supper made them feel closer to the other participants in the Lord's Supper.¹³⁶ Similarly, those who agreed to celebrating the Lord's Supper more than monthly increased by seventeen percent.¹³⁷ On the contrary, at the outset of Jones's research, only about fifty percent of the church agreed that they wanted to celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as the church offered it, and by the end, there was a sixteen percent increase in the amount of people who wanted to celebrate the Lord's Supper as often as possible. Interestingly, there was no decrease in the number who did not want to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly.¹³⁸ However, Jones's theory was proven true, especially since the vast majority agreed that the Lord's Supper "is an essential part of my spiritual life" by the end.¹³⁹ Like Akinbode, Jones's context has overlaps with the context of this thesis, though not without significant, observable distinctions.

Jones's church is a Methodist church like Akinbode's church and unlike Garden City Bible Fellowship's evangelical and Grace Brethren background.¹⁴⁰ Like Garden City Bible Fellowship, Jones's church is almost exclusively Caucasian.¹⁴¹ Unlike Garden City Bible Fellowship, Jones's church is much larger.¹⁴² The most important overlap between Jones's

¹³⁶ Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus," 65.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 42, 65.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁴² Ibid., 4.

context and the context of this thesis is the frequency of the Lord's Supper prior to intervening. Both churches celebrated the Lord's Supper quarterly before celebrating it weekly.¹⁴³ This makes the results of Jones's thesis a good baseline expectation for what is expected to happen at Garden City Bible Fellowship, especially since the intervention is so similar, celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. However, Jones's thesis only includes a very truncated theological defense of this practice, nor does he include a communal meal alongside the weekly Lord's Supper.¹⁴⁴ However, he implements research to test his hypothesis, and ultimately, his findings prove his hypothesis correct and consistent with Akinbode's findings. Unsurprisingly, when their methods of testing their theories are compared, they are similar.

How did Jones implement research in his similar intervention? Like Akinbode and this thesis, the primary determiner of change was surveys for Jones.¹⁴⁵ However, his research methodology is actually almost identical to that of Akinbode. Jones included accompanying sermons while celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly.¹⁴⁶ In his research, Jones also included small groups.¹⁴⁷ These interviews also gave him the opportunity to conduct interviews.¹⁴⁸ However, the conclusions of his research and the last thesis project stemmed primarily from the survey results, which is why this thesis places exclusive emphasis on them.

The last research project relevant to this thesis project is Leslie Svendsen's, "The Sacrament of Holy Communion." The basis of her project is like Jones's thesis, that the Lord's

¹⁴³ Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus," 10, 84.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 44, 61.

Supper results in spiritual blessings, causing the participants to want to celebrate it more often.¹⁴⁹ The context of this thesis is the most dissimilar from Garden City Bible Fellowship. Svendsen's church is a Lutheran church.¹⁵⁰ This church originally celebrated the Lord's Supper quarterly, like Garden City Bible Fellowship, but then over the years gradually increased its frequency from quarterly to monthly to, finally, biweekly.¹⁵¹ Increasing to a weekly frequency of the Lord's Supper in this congregation is significantly easier than increasing to a weekly frequency of the Lord's Supper in Garden City Bible Fellowship. Furthermore, the research process is different in Svendsen's context because children are included in the Lord's Supper as long as they were baptized as infants.¹⁵² The theoretical approach in this thesis has the fewest parallels, but since her intervention overlaps with this intervention in the form of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly for a total of twenty weeks, Svendsen's theoretical approach is worth examining.¹⁵³

To observe the effects of celebrating the Lord's Supper, Svendsen used many intakes for information. She emphasized surveys, but also feedback after preaching sermons on the subject of the Lord's Supper.¹⁵⁴ These sermons reflect the content of Svendsen's thesis, which focused on demonstrating what the Lord's Supper is and not how often churches should celebrate it or whether or not there should be a communal meal, like in this project.¹⁵⁵ Once again, the

¹⁴⁹ Leslie Gene Svendsen, "The Sacrament of Holy Communion: A Study of the Relationship Between Practice and Understanding in One Lutheran Congregation," DMin thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, 1995, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 4, 54.

¹⁵² Ibid., 6.

¹⁵³ Ibid., i.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., i-ii.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 67-103.

theological foundation for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly and the inclusion of a communal meal is the unique aspect of this thesis, which plows new ground in the realm of research. This is also true for the focus on the communal benefits of this thesis, instead of individual benefits. With regard to the individual benefits, Svendsen's research supported her theory. Initially, sixty-four percent of the participants agreed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly, which is an impressively high statistic. By the end of her research, seventy-eight percent agreed, which is again an impressive majority.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, the introductory survey revealed that sixty-two percent of participants agreed to receiving joy from the Lord's Supper, and this number increased to seventy percent in the conclusory surveys.¹⁵⁷ One wonders if there was ever really a problem in Svendsen's Ministry Context that needed to be solved by celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. Despite this, her, Akinbode's, and Wilson's theses result in multitudinous theoretical conclusions.

When the survey results of these theses are compared, the results are both clear and up for debate. The individual benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly are self-evident. In every context, the participants experienced a considerable increase in joy and spiritual vitality from celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. This fact alone justifies the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. However, the theses did not provide clear conclusions regarding the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. None defended the practice on a theological level, and they did not find unanimous agreement from their participants on the subject. Despite experiencing the benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, the participants did not resoundingly agree that it should be celebrated weekly. It is at this point that this thesis project

¹⁵⁶ Svendsen, "The Sacrament of Holy Communion," 54

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 54-55.

fills the void. It provides the theological foundation for the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, even though they are not explicitly commanded to do so. It also provides the theological foundation for the biblical practice of including a communal meal, the love feast, alongside the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper. This massive theological gap is filled by this thesis. This thesis also addresses a theory that research has not fully explored yet. The aforementioned theses addressed the individual benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, but this thesis also explores the communal benefits. Can fellowship and love be improved by celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with the love feast? Research has not answered this question, and this thesis will address this unanswered question. If the previous research does not answer this question with a definitive theoretical solution (and it does not), then the practices of other ministries is even less definitive and more vague.

Ministries

To this point, there have been no theoretical models in ministries that celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal implemented in churches or ministries in the United States. Seemingly every church knows of the concept of Sunday school and of the program of AWANA. There are no programs in place that implement the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis with a meal in churches. There is scant information available describing how churches practice the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. The reason for this is multifaceted. First, as was just mentioned, there is no official model or program for doing this. Second, because there are no programs to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal, each church is free to decide how it wants to implement this practice. Therefore, there is not universality. Frances Kostarelos describes celebrating the Lord's Supper in the evening on Sunday.¹⁵⁸ Others, like Garden City

¹⁵⁸ Kostarelos, *Feeling the Spirit*, 91.

Bible Fellowship, eat the meal after the morning gathering on Sunday. Some, like those related to the theses mentioned previously, do not include a meal. Others, like Garden City Bible Fellowship, include a meal. There is no consensus on the theoretical implementation of this thesis. Third, there are simply not many churches practicing the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. Consequently, there are no agreed upon theoretical foundations. Each ministry must decide how to best implement the Lord's Supper and the accompanying love feast in its own context. This makes this thesis even more valuable, seeking to demonstrate an effective theoretical foundation for any church to implement in the future to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the communal love feast on a weekly basis. This is because at this point, there is no theoretical foundation for this exact practice. The only agreement in the research so far is the theory that the Lord's Supper has personal spiritual benefits for individual participants if a church celebrates it weekly. Now, this theory will expand to the benefits for the church as a whole if the Lord's Supper is not only celebrated weekly, but also with a meal.

Chapter 3 Methodology

To address this perceived problem, an intervention is necessary. This proposed intervention is simple: survey the congregation regarding their fellowship and love beforehand, then celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal for many weeks before surveying the congregation again to see if fellowship and love have improved. How this intervention will take place is explained later, but first, the purpose of this intervention agrees with this thesis that is to build fellowship and love among Garden City Bible Fellowship in a biblical way. Given the preceding theological and theoretical foundations, a biblical way to achieve this objective is by celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal since this intervention is associated with both love and fellowship in the Bible. However, while this might sound like an easy intervention with simple logistics, it is not so. The task at hand requires meticulous planning.

Intervention Design

From start to finish, it is necessary to describe every specific detail in this intervention. If done correctly, the participants will be fully informed of the intention of this intervention and assured of their confidentiality and anonymity while participating. Furthermore, the participants' answers in the surveys will be authentic and will clearly demonstrate the effects of this intervention, which is, of course, the primary goal. Consequently, from start to finish, every detail must be planned.

Prerequisite Planning

To accomplish this intervention, it is necessary for the entire leadership to agree to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. At Garden City Bible Fellowship, decisions are made by the three elders, including this author, and the two deacons. Consequently, these five men will meet

(along with their wives as they too will be affected by this decision because they cook most of the food) to discuss the intervention and make decisions. These decisions include the following: introducing the intervention, day and time, participants, preparatory work, meal logistics, the bread and the cup logistics, timeframe, and data collection. Although, before making these decisions, it is necessary to possess the buy-in of the leadership to even celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. Consequently, an explanation for the biblical practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly will be provided at this meeting. This explanation will be exactly what was presented previously in the theological foundations portion of this thesis. Upon concluding this explanation, there will be an allotted time for questions from the rest of the leadership and for discussion. Once everyone agrees when and how the Lord's Supper will be implemented weekly, the decisions can be made regarding the aforementioned list, the details of which are provided in the following sections.

Introducing the Intervention

As the pastor who does almost all the announcements and preaching at Garden City Bible Fellowship, it will be very easy to introduce the intervention to the congregation. The pastor who will preach that Sunday also provides the announcements at the outset of the Sunday morning gathering, and once approved by the elders and deacons, the congregation will receive an announcement during the next two Sunday morning gatherings preceding the implementation of the intervention. This will allow the congregation sufficient time to prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. The congregation will also receive time to ask questions and to voice concerns regarding this intervention both in public when the researcher asks for questions or concerns after announcing the intervention, as well as privately after the Sunday morning gathering. This will allow every potential participant to speak freely and have any questions

answered before participating. The content of the announcements will further solidify the idea that no one is forced to participate.

The announcements leading up to the intervention will include all the necessary information. First, the announcements will include the fact that their pastor is also pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree through Liberty Theological Seminary. Consequently, to graduate with this degree, their pastor must complete a thesis project in his Ministry Context based upon research. In this case, research will be conducted to determine whether celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly alongside a communal meal after the Sunday morning gathering will strengthen love and fellowship at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Second, the announcements will include the logistics of how this intervention will proceed, all of which is detailed later. To summarize, the intervention will begin by participants completing an introductory survey as a baseline for research. The intervention will end by participants completing a conclusory survey, which will demonstrate whether fellowship and love was strengthened at Garden City Bible Fellowship when compared to the introductory survey results. In between these two surveys, immediately after the Sunday morning gathering for five weeks, those who participate will enjoy a meal together and partake of the bread and the cup to conclude the meal. Third, the announcements will emphasize that the surveys are completed anonymously, and participation in the Lord's Supper and meal is completely voluntary with no consequences should anyone choose to not participate or cease participation. Finally, the announcements will ask for questions right then and there and will also tell everyone that questions can be asked in private after the gathering as well. Once these announcements are issued, the congregation will be informed concerning the details of this intervention. However, a sermon is necessary to inform the congregation regarding the foundation of this intervention.

To introduce this intervention, this researcher will preach a sermon on the subject. In God's providence, He has presented a perfect opportunity to do so without any disjunction. The pastors of Garden City Bible Fellowship have preached expository sermons for years, preaching through entire books of the Bible at a time verse-by-verse. Currently, Garden City Bible Fellowship is studying the book of Luke. Not coincidentally, the timeframe of this intervention will begin the week after the congregation is scheduled to study the Lord's Supper in Luke 22:14-20. This provides the perfect opportunity to introduce the theological foundation for this intervention to the congregation. This will allow them to be prepared mentally and theologically with regard to the reason why they will celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal.

The outline for this sermon includes three points. The first point is "The context of the Lord's Supper," which can be found in Luke 22:14-15, which says, "And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'" The context of the Lord's Supper is important because it demonstrates the origin of the Lord's Supper and informs the readers how the Lord's Supper should be celebrated today. In this case, as was proven previously, the context of the Lord's Supper is the Passover meal.¹ This already hints that the Lord's Supper was meant to be celebrated in the context of a communal meal. From here, the sermon will look at other passages that demonstrate how the context of the Lord's Supper is supposed to be in a communal meal. Particularly, the sermon will emphasize 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 because it demonstrates that the early church could not have abused the Lord's Supper if they did not celebrate it in the context of a communal meal.² The context of the Lord's Supper's institution was a communal meal, and the

¹ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 112.

² Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, Kindle.

earliest churches celebrated it in this context. Therefore, the inclusion of a communal meal in this intervention will become evident in the preaching of this sermon. Similarly, the inclusion of the bread and the cup and the basis of implementing this intervention in the present will be evident due to this sermon as well.

The second point of this sermon will be “The perpetuity of the Lord’s Supper,” based on Luke 22:16-18, which says, “For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’” In these verses, Jesus both institutes the Lord’s Supper and declares that he will not participate in it until the kingdom of God comes. This sermon will demonstrate that Jesus is referring to his second coming when he says, “until the kingdom of God comes,” and this proves that the Lord’s Supper is meant to be celebrated in between Jesus’s first and second advents. The literature cited in preceding sections agrees that the Lord’s Supper is meant to be celebrated continually as a perpetual duty by the church as well.³ Therefore, this point of the sermon shows the precedent for celebrating the Lord’s Supper at all as a modern church. Jesus provided the Lord’s Supper for his people to celebrate in this intervening time. The debate is over the frequency of the Lord’s Supper, which will be the third and final point.

The sermon will end with a teaching on “The frequency of the Lord’s Supper” from Luke 22:19-20, which says, “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” A brief amount of time will be devoted to the content of the Lord’s

³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 335.

Supper, which is bread and drink from the vine. However, this point of the sermon will not receive the majority of the time allotted because the content of the Lord's Supper is an agreed upon subject.⁴ The sermon will devote most of the time to the frequency of the Lord's Supper. When Jesus commands, "Do this in remembrance of me," he gives the imperative in the present tense. In the words of one Greek scholar, Bill Mounce, "The imperative built on the present tense stem is called the *present* imperative and indicates continuous action."⁵ Specifically, when someone gives a command in the present tense in the Greek of the New Testament, the speaker is communicating that he wants his audience to "continue" to do something or "keep on" doing something.⁶ Consequently, when Jesus commands his disciples to "Do this in remembrance of me" in the present tense, he is commanding them to continually do this in remembrance of him. If a father were to command his son in Greek in the present tense to clean his room, the son would be disobedient if he only cleaned his room annually, semiannually, quarterly, or even monthly or biweekly. Instead, the son is expected to do this frequently. In the case of the early church and the Lord's Supper, they celebrated it weekly, which is the next aspect of this introductory sermon.

The sermon will examine the verses interpreted in the Theological Foundation, but the two verses that will receive the most time and effort will be Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7. The same arguments used in previous sections will be present in the sermon. The church breaking bread in Acts 2:42 refers to the Lord's Supper.⁷ The apostle Paul took a detour to Troas to celebrate the

⁴ Behm, "Klāō," 438.

⁵ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 310.

⁶ Ibid., 313.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 929.

Lord's Supper with that church because he knew they celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly.⁸ Most importantly, the correlation between fellowship and the Lord's Supper will be emphasized in this sermon, particularly from Acts 2:42.⁹ This sermon introduces this research intervention perfectly. After the sermon concludes, Garden City Bible Fellowship will understand why the Lord's Supper should still be celebrated after Jesus's death. After the sermon concludes, Garden City Bible Fellowship will understand what the bread and the cup depict, namely his bodily and bloody sacrifice on the cross. After the sermon concludes, Garden City Bible Fellowship will understand why there is a meal included with the Lord's Supper, because Jesus instituted it in the context of a meal. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, by the time the sermon concludes, Garden City Bible Fellowship will understand why they will celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, which is because Jesus gave a present imperative at the institution of the Lord's Supper to "Do this in remembrance of me," and because the early church celebrated it weekly in the book of Acts. Between the two announcements and the sermon leading up to the intervention, Garden City Bible Fellowship will be thoroughly informed before voluntarily participating in this intervention. What cannot be overlooked, however, is not only the basis of this intervention, but also the logistics, beginning with when it will take place.

Day and Time

Garden City Bible Fellowship gathers every Sunday morning upstairs in the chapel at 11:00 A.M., and this gathering lasts until approximately 12:15 P.M. For this intervention, the church will celebrate the Lord's Supper immediately following this service every Sunday, despite the fact that the early church's meal was a *deipnon*, a dinner, according to 1 Corinthians

⁸ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, 101.

⁹ Polhill, *The New American Commentary, Volume 26: Acts*, 119.

11:20-21.¹⁰ There are many reasons for this. First, the Sunday morning gathering is the most commonly attended gathering of Garden City Bible Fellowship. Therefore, for the greatest amount of participation, the Lord's Supper will be celebrated immediately after this service, with the accompanying meal being everyone's lunch for the day. In the past, the Lord's Supper was celebrated after the Sunday evening service, and they celebrated a meal as well, which corresponded to dinner, *deipnon*, that day. However, these gatherings were very sparsely attended, with less than a dozen people attending on average. Therefore, for participation's sake, it is best to celebrate the Lord's Supper immediately following the Sunday morning gathering, which has had much higher participation averages lately. Second and related, this is the most convenient time to celebrate the Lord's Supper. People would not have to go home for a few hours and then return, which negatively affects attendance. Instead, the intervention is accomplished in one gathering. Third, the benefits to love and fellowship are not dependent on the time of day in which the meal takes place. There is nothing inherently more uniting about a communal dinner compared to a communal lunch, which is why a shift from the *deipnon* to lunch after the gathering is being made. While it might seem like a simple matter, the transition from the Sunday morning gathering to the Lord's Supper is specific and requires significant detail if the intervention is to go smoothly.

To encourage participation, Sunday school during these successive Sundays will be canceled. Sunday school begins at 9:45 A.M. and concludes at 10:45 A.M., fifteen minutes prior to the start of the Sunday morning gathering. In the past, when Garden City Bible Fellowship celebrated the Lord's Supper after the Sunday morning gathering and Sunday school, participants expressed that the day was too long. They expressed that any children present were

¹⁰ Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering*, 104.

becoming very tired, and even the adults expressed a desire to shorten the duration. Consequently, to ensure the best culture to intervene with a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper and a meal, Garden City Bible Fellowship will cancel Sunday school during this intervention. This allows the congregation, at least those who participate, to devote their minds and hearts each week to the Sunday morning gathering and to the Lord's Supper, which are biblical practices, rather than to Sunday school, which is not a biblical practice.

Participants

At the close of the Sunday morning gathering, this author, as the preaching pastor, will describe the transition into the Lord's Supper to the congregation from the pulpit. Currently, the church meets in the chapel upstairs, and at the close of the service, those in the congregation who qualify will be dismissed downstairs to the dining commons. This is the time when an explanation will also be provided regarding who can and cannot participate in the Lord's Supper. Specifically, only those who have been baptized and profess to believe in Jesus Christ¹¹ and their children will be asked to move downstairs. Those who will participate will be called to examine themselves before heading downstairs, particularly for any sins they might have committed but not confessed to God or any hostility they might have with another believer with whom they need to reconcile.¹² This examination period is in line with 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks

¹¹ Finn, "Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord's Supper," 13.

¹² *The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith with Proof Texts in Modern English*, (Coolidge, AZ: Gregory J. Thornberg & Rob Hudelson, 2014), 316.

judgment on himself.” Therefore, warnings will be given, and the prerequisites of baptism and faith in Christ will likewise be described before dismissing the qualified participants downstairs for the Lord’s Supper. The rest are dismissed and are free to go home. Membership could be considered a necessary prerequisite to participating in the Lord’s Supper, but this would unnecessarily limit the survey size. There are some who attend Garden City Bible Fellowship regularly who are not members, despite being baptized believers. Rather than unnecessarily excluding them, it would be more efficient to allow them to participate in the Lord’s Supper and in the surveys, though there will be a question that asks them to identify whether or not they are a member of Garden City Bible Fellowship. This places the onus of participation solely on baptism and a confession of faith, but there is a caveat to these prerequisites.

Only those who have been baptized in the past and profess faith in Christ can participate in this intervention by eating of the meal and partaking of the bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper and filling out a survey. However, their children who have not been baptized and/or have not professed faith in Christ will be allowed to attend and eat of the meal, though they will not be allowed to partake of the bread and the cup and will not be surveyed for this project’s research. The reasons for the allowance of their presence is multifaceted. First, spiritually, allowing the children to be with their parents encourages these children to adopt the faith of their parents. Second, practically, allowing the children to be with their parents makes it more likely that the parents will stay and celebrate the Lord’s Supper because they would be unwilling to stay and celebrate with the rest of Garden City Bible Fellowship if their children could not eat the meal. However, the non-baptized/non-confessing children of baptized/confessing parents will not complete any surveys because this intervention is designed to strengthen the fellowship of the believers at Garden City Bible Fellowship, of which the non-baptized/non-confessing children

would not be considered a part. Similarly, it is necessary to enter the longstanding debate regarding the participation of young children in the Lord's Supper, who in this intervention will be forbidden from participating.¹³ No one under the age of eighteen will be allowed to complete the introductory and conclusory surveys. This prohibition is due to the mature nature of the problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship and this intervention. Those under eighteen will not necessarily be able to discern the current state of fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, nor will they necessarily be able to discern any changes in love and fellowship that might or might not occur over the span of this intervention. Consequently, they will be excluded from completing surveys, but obviously will be included in the meal and, if a baptized believer, the bread and the cup as well. Every week, these exclusions will be reiterated when explaining the qualifications for participation upstairs from the pulpit and downstairs after everyone has moved to the dining commons as the Lord's Supper begins.

Preparation

Downstairs is the dining commons at Garden City Bible Fellowship. At all times, there are tables and chairs set up, which allow for seating and serving for approximately fifty people. Therefore, no preparation is needed regarding the setting up of tables and chairs. What is required is assistance setting out the food, drinks, and utensils. To this end, deacons and volunteers will accomplish this duty. Consequently, volunteers must be recruited before this intervention occurs. This should not cause any problems, however, because in previous celebrations of the Lord's Supper, there have always been approximately five women, along with the deacons, who voluntarily prepared everything. However, their participation cannot be

¹³ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 500.

assumed, so it is necessary to acquire their consent for assistance beforehand without coercion. These volunteers and deacons will oversee the setting of the tablecloths for the dining tables, plasticware, paper plates, napkins, the food, drinks, and serving utensils. They will accomplish this work before the gathering upstairs concludes. After volunteering and hearing their expectations, they will know to dismiss themselves as the sermon concludes. This gives them plenty of time to prepare for the meal while the sermons ends, a closing prayer is made, everyone stands and sings a song together, and the prerequisite requirements for participating in the Lord's Supper are announced. Similarly, these volunteers are also tasked with receiving and storing all the food for the potluck that is brought in before the gathering begins. They already have considerable experience in this area, so once again this aspect of the intervention should go smoothly. When these volunteers are identified and commissioned for this task after providing consent, most of the necessary volunteer work is covered, but not all.

The source of food is a major factor in this intervention. If there is going to be a meal, then there must be food. Garden City Bible Fellowship is not in a financial position to provide food for the entire congregation every week. Therefore, it is necessary to arrange potluck meals or meals provided by an individual, which necessitates the voluntary participation of the congregation to provide the food.¹⁴ Fortunately, Garden City Bible Fellowship has practiced potluck meals in the past, though at very irregular intervals, approximately four times per year. Nevertheless, every time they have been called upon to provide food for a potluck meal, they have always delivered even beyond expectations. Therefore, while it is necessary to inform the congregation of the necessity of providing food for the potluck, which will be announced from the pulpit, there will be no problem securing enough food for the two meals provided by the

¹⁴ Bruce P. Powers, *Church Administration Handbook*, 3rd ed., (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 188.

congregation. However, to not place a burden on the congregation, this researcher will provide pizza for two of the meals during this intervention. For the fifth week, a friend has volunteered to provide and prepare food for the participants to enjoy. Consequently, all five meals of this intervention are accounted for, and none of these meals will cost the church anything other than the utensils, napkins, plates, and cups. Even the bread and the juice are accounted for as well.

No celebration of the Lord's Supper is complete without the bread and the cup. The bread and grape juice are already supplied by the pastor's family, and these elements are always prepared by the deacons beforehand, who pour the cup of grape juice into individual serving cups for each person to drink from and arrange the bread on a plate for easy distribution. This practice of divvying out the single cup of juice into individual cups of juice is a personal choice, one that many other congregations prefer as well due to health concerns of dozens drinking from a single cup.¹⁵ Simultaneously, the symbolism of the single cup in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 remains since all the juice originates from a single glass. Between the congregation and the volunteers and deacons, all the preparatory work needed for this intervention is provided at a high level of quality. Likewise, the equipment that is already present is of a high quality.

Thankfully, no new equipment is needed for this intervention. Garden City Bible Fellowship already possesses two large refrigerators with freezers and a food warmer in the kitchen, which is quite sizable. Furthermore, there is an adjacent storage closet. Thus, there is no need to acquire any new equipment to accomplish this intervention. Furthermore, the church also has a very large stock of plasticware, napkins, and paper plates and has enough inventory to support this multi-week intervention. Therefore, the infrastructure is not a problem in this intervention. The volunteers and deacons have more than adequate space to store all the food

¹⁵ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, 288.

provided voluntarily, which they will gather before the gathering begins at 11:00 A.M. and set out toward the end of the gathering, which for them will be approximately 12:00 P.M. All this preparatory work is necessary for this intervention because it allows for the greatest opportunity of success. If it is chaos during the Lord's Supper and its meal, then fellowship will almost be impossible. People will not be sharing with one another, but will rather be focused on attempting to manage all the chaos. Therefore, by having volunteers and deacons who are prepared to handle all the preparatory work and by sufficiently explaining who is and is not qualified to participate, the participants in the Lord's Supper and its meal can focus solely on fellowshiping with their Lord and with one another, which is exactly what this intervention intends to achieve and analyze. With all the preparatory work planned, all the volunteers recruited and informed and overseen, and all the participants informed, this leaves only the actual implementation of the Lord's Supper and the love feast at Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Meal

To begin the Lord's Supper, everyone will take their seats before a prayer is made to thank God for the food. At this point, the participants are dismissed to gather their food. Whenever many people gather for a meal, serving the food becomes an important consideration. There are projected to be too many individuals to serve family style, passing the food dishes one-by-one. Cafeteria serving requires burdening the volunteers with yet another duty by having them serve individuals, and this style unnecessarily slows down the serving process. By using the buffet style, the participants can make two lines on either side of the table with all the food, thereby speeding up the serving process. The only downside is that people might take too much food for themselves, but this has not been a problem in the past. Therefore, in this scenario, it is best to use the buffet serving style, whether the meal is a potluck provided by the church, the

meal provided by the volunteer, or pizza provided by this author.¹⁶ Once everyone has served himself or herself and sat down at the tables, everyone can fulfill the purpose of this intervention by fellowshiping with one another. Meals provide a fantastic opportunity for participants to have fellowship, *koinōnia*, by sharing with one another. The potluck meal already contributes to this sharing since the participants are sharing food that each contributed with one another. Once eating, the participants can now share everything with one another. They can share life information about themselves, information about their history, family, employment, anything. They can share thoughts on the sermon, which immediately preceded the meal. This meal provides the natural setting to build fellowship just as Scripture intended. However, this meal is only one-half of the source of fellowship between the participants. The other half comes at the conclusion with the bread and the cup.

The Bread and the Cup

The meal comes first, followed by the bread and the cup at the conclusion of the meal. This follows the historical order, in which the meal culminates with the bread and the cup according to Justin Martyr, the second century Christian apologist.¹⁷ At the conclusion of the meal, when it becomes evident that everyone has finished their meals and their conversations, the meaning of the bread and the cup will be explained from a brief teaching from a rotation of passages, including Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23, John 13:1-20, 1 Cor. 10:16-17, and 11:23-26. This allows for variety when celebrating the Lord's Supper every week and also provides the participants the exact reason why they are eating bread and drinking juice, the other half of the source of fellowship for the participants. They are not only sharing with one

¹⁶ Powers, *Church Administration Handbook*, 188.

¹⁷ Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, Kindle.

another in conversation and a meal, but also spiritually in faith in Jesus Christ. After all, that is what the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper demonstrates and strengthens—one's faith in their Savior. By partaking of the bread and the cup together, all the participants are professing that they share one Savior while they remember what he did for them. Between the meal and the bread and the cup, the Lord's Supper provides a biblical breeding ground for fellowship at Garden City Bible Fellowship. To serve the bread and the cup, volunteers will be necessary.

At Garden City Bible Fellowship, there are two deacons and two elders besides this researcher, and these men will rotate to serve the bread and the cup. Two of the men will stand at the front of the table, each holding one of the elements, and everyone will be asked to stand and to take a piece of the bread and one of the cups before sitting down again. Once every qualified participant sits down, Luke 22:19 will be read before asking everyone to partake of the bread. Similarly, after partaking of the bread, Luke 22:20 will be read before asking everyone to partake of the cup. To close, a prayer will be said before dismissing everyone. At this point, it is necessary to clean up the dining commons. Once again, the deacons and volunteers will be tasked with cleaning up after the meal. While Bruce Powers recommends hiring individuals to clean up, the logistics of Garden City Bible Fellowship do not allow for this.¹⁸ Instead, the volunteers and deacons will suffice, especially since there will not be a great many people participating, maybe two dozen. Garden City Bible Fellowship will then repeat this process every week for five weeks.

Timeframe

This intervention will span five weeks, spanning five consecutive Sundays. This intervention will begin Sunday, February 23, 2020, and will conclude Sunday, March 22, 2020.

¹⁸ Powers, *Church Administration Handbook*, 188.

This provides a total of five Sundays to celebrate the Lord's Supper and its communal meal, which is sufficient for the congregation to discern any strengthening of fellowship and love. As stated previously, Garden City Bible Fellowship only celebrates the Lord's Supper four times per year on these holidays: Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Therefore, switching to weekly celebrations of the Lord's Supper could prove daunting to the congregation.

Nevertheless, with the leadership's approval and with the congregation's voluntary participation, this drastic shift in methodology will not cause any problems. In fact, this massive change in methodology will make any changes in fellowship and love indicated by the surveys even clearer. If there is a significant change in fellowship and love, then the cause must be this five-week intervention. Five weeks will suffice, providing the congregation many opportunities to sit with several other participants. If Garden City Bible Fellowship were a much larger church, then five weeks would likely be insufficient. However, with a much lower number of participants, five weeks provides an opportunity for everyone to fellowship with several other participants, perhaps even all other participant depending on the amount of participation.

This timeline is also advantageous for participation. The beginning of the year is when attendance is most consistent at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Consequently, the number of participants should be at its highest during this time. This provides the greatest sampling to survey, resulting in a more reliable analysis of the intervention's success or failure to build fellowship and love. By celebrating the Lord's Supper five times in successive weeks during this time of the year, anyone who consistently attends should be able to participate multiple times and, therefore, be a valuable participant in this intervention.

The duration of each Lord's Supper varies depending on the amount of conversation and time needed to eat the meal, but the average length in the past is approximately one hour. This

provides plenty of time to eat lunch together before partaking of the bread and the cup.

Leisureliness is crucial to this intervention. If people feel rushed, then they will not engage in fellowship to the necessary extent. They will not have the necessary time to talk and learn about one another. Consequently, the communal meal will only transition to the bread and the cup when it is clear that there is hardly any talking occurring and when it is clear that everyone has finished his or her meal. Rushing this process would be a mistake, and it would adversely affect the result of the surveys, which will be the primary source of data in this intervention.

Data Collection

To determine whether or not this intervention built fellowship and love during this five-week intervention at Garden City Bible Fellowship, surveys will be handed out at the beginning and end of this process. Copies of these surveys are included in the appendices. The introductory survey will differ slightly from the conclusory survey since this first survey will merely help to obtain an idea of where Garden City Bible Fellowship is in terms of fellowship, love, the frequency of the Lord's Supper, and the inclusion of a meal. On the other hand, the conclusory surveys will not only ask the same questions as the introductory survey to determine whether any changes occurred in the participants' views on the Lord's Supper's frequency, the inclusion of a meal, or the fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, but it will also include questions that will demonstrate how each participant experienced the intervention. The effects of this intervention can only be determined by the survey questions.

The questions that will be consistent between both surveys are self-explanatory. Do the participants agree or disagree that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly? Do they agree or disagree that the Lord's Supper should include a meal? Do they agree or disagree that the Lord's Supper and the accompanying communal meal should only be celebrated intermittently

due to the amount of work necessary? Do they agree or disagree that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship? Do they agree or disagree that love is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship? These are the primary aspects the surveys will discern if any changes have occurred. For the sake of consistency and quantifiability, all the questions will be quantitative and not qualitative. There will be no short answers. Most questions will only allow someone to strongly disagree, disagree, be unsure, agree, or strongly agree on a scale from one to five. Some questions will provide specific answers to choose from, and the rest will be yes or no questions. This will take the subjectivity out of the intervention and is valid for both the introductory and conclusory surveys. All the surveys will be anonymous, thereby ensuring confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, the participants will place their completed surveys in a drop box by the door before they leave. This way, the identity of those who completed which survey will remain anonymous. Furthermore, the consent form, which every participant will receive before participating, will also include a statement of confidentiality, mentioning that the surveys will not contain any identifying information. Along with the consent form, each participant will also receive a recruitment form, explaining that participation is completely voluntary. Indeed, all this information should not be new to the participants because the same information will be announced during the weeks leading up to the intervention. The content of the surveys is important, but so are the logistics of these surveys.

To conduct these surveys, many handouts will be necessary, and to that end, Garden City Bible Fellowship already has more than enough paper and a printer in the office. Pens and pencils are also necessary so the participants can fill out each survey, and Garden City Bible Fellowship also already has a sufficient stash of pens and pencils in the office. Overall, every single resource needed for this thesis project and intervention is already readily available,

making the implementation quite easy. The only difficulty in this intervention is ensuring that the protocol of the participants is natural. Fellowship is meant to be a natural process where people voluntarily and willingly share with one another in unity. However, with the implementation of a survey alongside the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, the fellowship desired in this project could become forced if the participants know that it is the goal. Consequently, the questions will cover a range of topics, so that the spotlight will not be on fellowship. There will be one question regarding whether the participants agree or disagree that fellowship is currently strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship, but this question is the extent of the introductory questions that would suggest fellowship is the goal. Consequently, any fellowship that this project builds in Garden City Bible Fellowship will be genuine and unforced. Only the conclusory surveys will ask direct questions, whether the participants agree or disagree that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal has strengthened fellowship at Garden City Bible Fellowship, and additional questions regarding the participant's fellowship with Jesus Christ and others at Garden City Bible Fellowship. These conclusory surveys, when analyzed, will be compared and contrasted with the introductory surveys to determine any themes, slippages, and silences that emerge in a quantitative fashion.

Implementing the Intervention Design

Before participating, everyone who considers participating in this intervention will receive a recruitment letter. This recruitment letter will explain the reason for this intervention (fulfill a DMin thesis project), the purpose of this intervention (to build fellowship and love in a biblical way), the basis of this intervention (it is beneficial to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal), and the voluntary nature of participating in it. Along with the recruitment letter, everyone interested in participating in this thesis project's research will also receive a consent

form. This consent form will inform the participants of their rights and will describe in even more depth the voluntary nature of participating. Additionally, the consent form will say once again that there are no consequences whatsoever for refusing to participate or ceasing to participate. The consent forms will also assure the potential participants that their survey answers, should they choose to participate, will be completely anonymous. The surveys will not ask any questions that identify the participant, and the participants will submit their surveys in an anonymous manner by placing them in a drop box. Due to the anonymous nature of this research, consent is given by completing the introductory survey, rather than by signing and submitting the consent form.

The method of identifying themes, slippages, and silences in this intervention entails quantitative surveys, which will consist of questions with limited answers, questions that can be answered with a “Yes” or a “No,” or statements with which the participant can agree or disagree. Regarding these statements, the survey will scale them from 1 to 5, 1 being “Strongly Disagree,” 2 being “Disagree,” 3 being “Unsure,” 4 being “Agree,” and 5 being “Strongly Agree.” This will allow for variation in answers while still providing quantitative answers. The questions in the introductory and conclusory surveys will differ slightly from one another but still have overlap. For example, both surveys will allow the participant to identify how old he or she is by decade, and both surveys will ask whether or not the participant has ever been in a church that celebrated the Lord’s Supper weekly and if it was a pleasant experience, for control purposes. Both surveys will also have each participant identify his or her gender, while remaining anonymous for confidentiality purposes, and will ask whether the participant is a member of Garden City Bible Fellowship, again, for control purposes. These background questions will allow the survey results to be analyzed broadly and categorically. For example, it is possible that overall, there is

not much change between the introductory surveys and the conclusory surveys. However, if the surveys submitted by members of Garden City Bible Fellowship see positive changes, while surveys submitted by attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship see negative changes, then it is a noteworthy delineation. If all the members have a positive experience, the intervention could be deemed a success, even if the attendees did not have a positive experience, resulting in a neutral outcome if the surveys are analyzed as a whole. This is just one example of how the age, gender, and membership identifiers can provide helpful categories to analyze the data provided by the introductory and conclusory surveys.

The introductory survey's purpose is to discover the current state of Garden City Bible Fellowship from their perspective. What is their own self-diagnosis? What is their background? To that end, one question will ask whether the participant has ever participated in the Lord's Supper weekly with another church. This will show if anyone has already experienced this intervention in the past and will show if anyone's survey results will not be viable communicants of change. The next questions in the introductory survey pertain to self-diagnosis, both personal and communal. The survey will make statements that the participants must either agree, disagree, or be indifferent toward. Personally, these statements will include, "I have enjoyed celebrating the Lord's Supper in the past," "I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it is too much work," "I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because I feel unworthy," "I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it loses its meaning," and others. Communally, these statements will include, "Fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship," "The Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly," "The Lord's Supper should be celebrated with a meal," and others. These questions and others like them will provide a good, quantifiable landscape of what each participant thinks about himself or herself in relation to this

project and the congregation as a whole. This will allow the conclusory and introductory surveys to be easily compared and contrasted.

As mentioned previously, the conclusory survey will have many of the same questions and statements as the introductory survey, such as the participant's age, gender, and membership. The majority of the survey will parallel the introductory survey, so that the two can be directly compared and contrasted. However, there will also be additional questions that only appear in the conclusory survey. Obviously, one such question must be, "How many communal meals have you participated in?" This is a crucial detail since the whole point of this thesis is regular participation in a communal meal and the Lord's Supper. Another additional question will determine whether the participant has enjoyed celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. The reasoning for this question is self-explanatory. The last three additional questions will put the consistent questions in context. On a scale of 1 to 5, does the participant agree or disagree that he or she is closer to another person at Garden City Bible Fellowship because of this intervention? Does the participant agree or disagree that he or she is closer to Jesus because of this intervention? These are important questions. If the participant says he or she did not enjoy celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal, but the participant also says he or she is closer to Jesus and someone else at Garden City Bible Fellowship, then the intervention will be considered to have accomplished its purpose, even if the participant did not enjoy the process. Similarly, the conclusory survey will ask the participants on a scale if they agree or disagree that fellowship was genuine during these communal meals. If the participants disagree that the fellowship was genuine, then it would be unsurprising if the participants also said that they did not see any improvement in fellowship or love. As stated previously, themes and slippages should be self-evident due to the simple and quantitative nature of these surveys, which will be

administered over a five-week span, and due to the anonymous and simple nature of the surveys silences should be at a minimum.

The first introductory survey was distributed on Sunday, February 23, the first time the Lord's Supper was celebrated. This same introductory survey was offered to anyone who participated in this project, even if they were not present on February 23. For example, if someone's first time participating was Sunday, March 1, then that person was administered a survey, and so on until Sunday, March 22, which was the last day the introductory survey was available. Even if someone only completed an introductory survey on March 22, at the end of the intervention, it is still helpful and worthwhile since it is better to have as many self-diagnoses as possible. Similarly, the conclusory survey was administered on Sunday, March 22, for all participants since that was the last day of the intervention. However, if someone knew he or she would be absent on Sunday, March 22, for any reason, and if that someone had participated in at least three communal meals, then that person was asked to complete the conclusory survey on March 15. In fact, if a participant knew he or she will not be present on March 15 or March 22 but has participated in at least three communal meals, then that participant would complete the conclusory survey on March 8, and that survey would be valid.

For someone's conclusory survey to be valid, then the minimum number of participations in the Lord's Supper must be at least three. However, this will be another category to analyze the data. For example, the results of the data as a whole could show no real gains in fellowship or love. However, if all those who participated in all five communal meals say that fellowship and love improved in their conclusory surveys, while all those who participated in three communal meals say that fellowship and love did not improve, then the intervention could still be a success. Perhaps those who did not participate often did not have a chance to see the strengthening of

fellowship and love. Thankfully, Garden City Bible Fellowship's attendance is quite regular, so the number of people who participate three or more times should be comparably high. There should not be a large gap between the number of completed introductory surveys and completed conclusory surveys. With these questions and qualifications, this implementation of the intervention should result in valid conclusions derived from self-evident themes and slippages in the survey results.

Chapter 4 Results

The expected and desired results of this intervention is the strengthening of fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship. These results are quantitative in nature by comparing the introductory and conclusory surveys. Specifically, there will ideally be tangible percentage differences between the two surveys. For example, both surveys will ask the participants to agree with, disagree with, or be unsure about the statement, “Fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship.” Should the intervention succeed to build fellowship at Garden City Bible Fellowship, there should be a tangible uptick in “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses in the conclusory surveys when compared to the introductory surveys. The same applies to the statement, “Love is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship.” There will also be two new, unique statements in the conclusory survey, “I am closer to Jesus because of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly,” and “I am closer to another person at Garden City Bible Fellowship because of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly.” While these two statements will not have direct parallel statements in the introductory survey to compare, these two statements could be the most revealing questions of this intervention. If a participant draws closer to Jesus and another person at Garden City Bible Fellowship because of this intervention, then the intervention is a tangible success even if a theme cannot be assigned to the results. For the rest of the participants’ answers, however, there will be tangible percentage differences.

As all the other statements have direct parallels between the introductory and conclusory surveys, simple mathematics will reveal the results. Given the Ministry Context at Garden City Bible Fellowship and the relatively low number of possible participants, the range of results could be very high for two reasons. First, when the sample pool is small, any change in answers between the two surveys results in a larger change in the results. If two people out of twenty

change their view and agree that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly, the percentage will be much higher than if two people out of two hundred change their view. Second, a close-knit group enjoying the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal has great potential to benefit from the meal because each participant can engage in fellowship with all other participants over the span of five weeks. Considering these observations, it is a reasonable goal to see a ten percent increase in favor of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal and a ten percent increase in the strength of fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, along with a majority who agree that they have drawn closer to Jesus and another person at Garden City Bible Fellowship due to this intervention. In order to observe any tangible developments in fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, it is necessary to analyze the introductory survey's results.

Introductory Survey Results

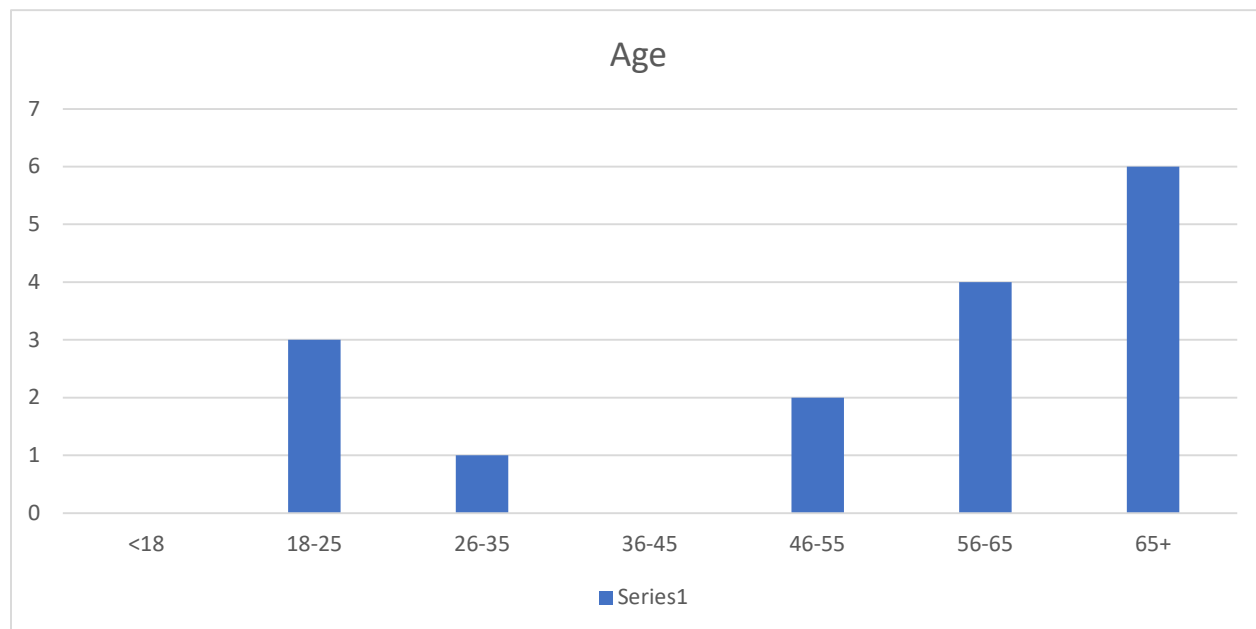


Figure 1.1

As expected, the number of actual participants was much lower than the number of possible participants. Of the thirty-three regular attendees, only sixteen ever participated in this

research project by completing an introductory survey, which is just under half. Also as expected, most of the participants were older, with two-thirds of the participants being over the age of fifty-five. Moreover, the observation made in the Ministry Context is confirmed here. There is a missing generation between the ages thirty-six and forty-five. None of these numbers are surprising though, and this trend continues in the gender of the participants.

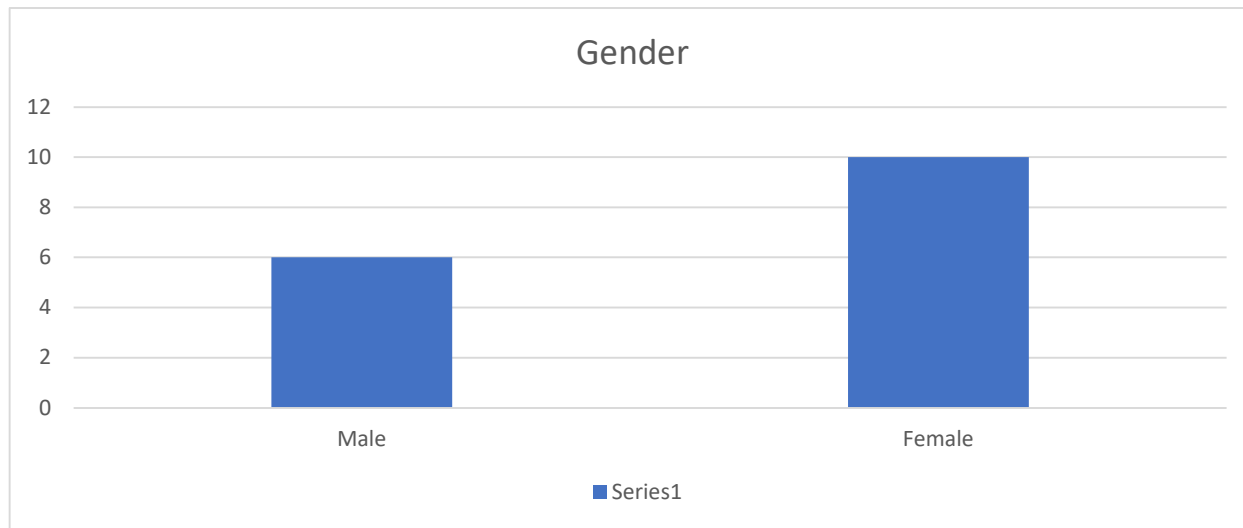


Figure 1.2

Unsurprisingly, the majority of the participants were female. Since nineteen of the thirty-three regular attendees, which is approximately six out of ten, are female, it is unsurprising that approximately six out of ten participants were female as well. However, the first surprise of the introductory survey came in the next question.

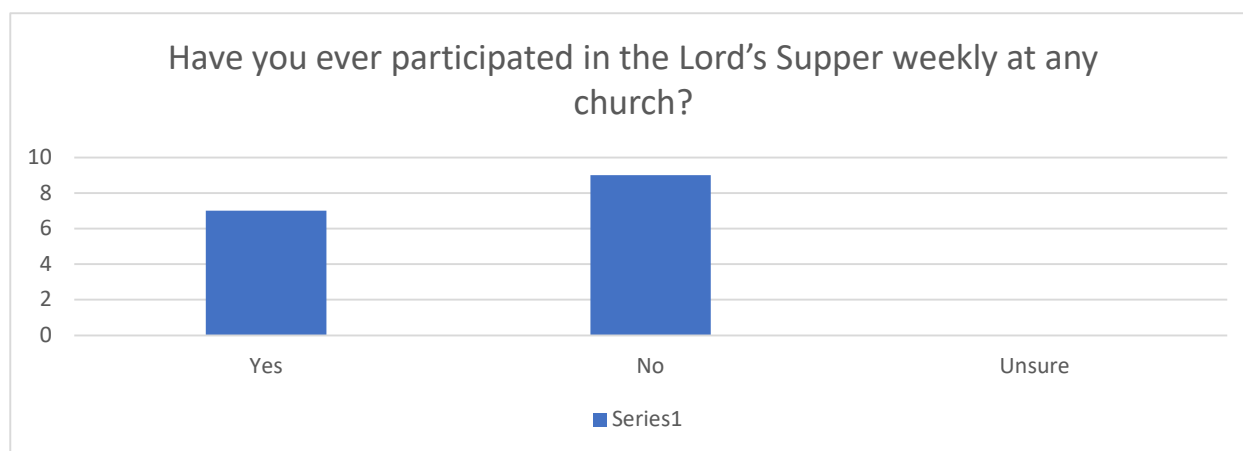


Figure 1.3

Surprisingly, almost half of the participants—seven out of sixteen—who completed the introductory survey had participated in the Lord’s Supper weekly in the past in some manner. With so many participants answering affirmatively to this question, the next question provided more of a foundation going forward than expected.

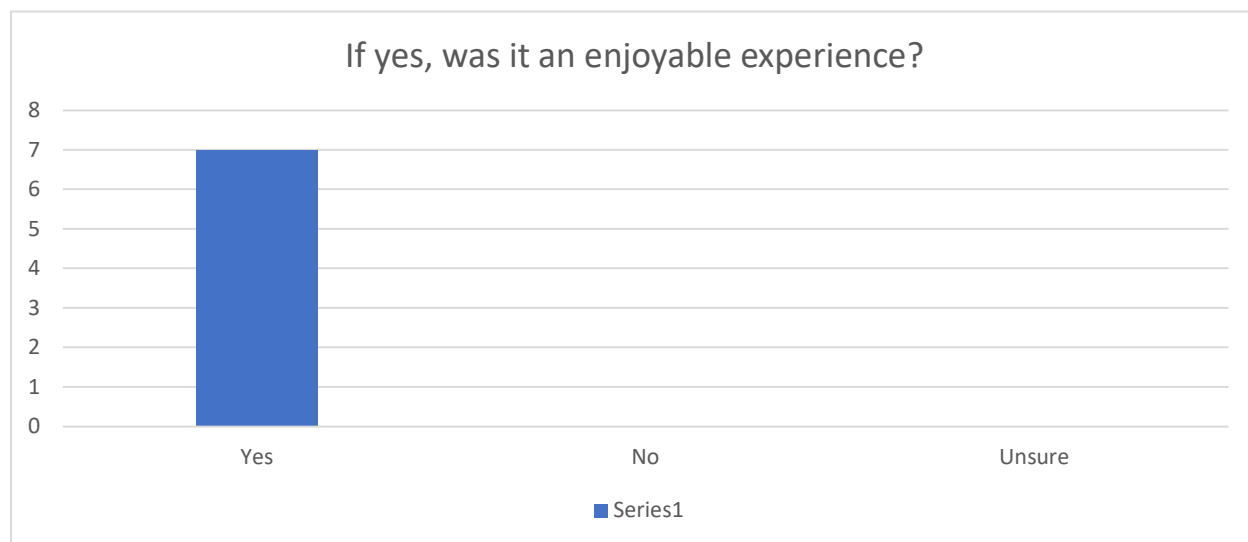


Figure 1.4

The number of participants who were able to answer this question is higher than expected, and the results of this question are also higher than expected. Without exception, every single person who has participated in the Lord’s Supper weekly in the past enjoyed the experience, lending credence to the thesis of this research project. This leaves only one final preliminary question in the introductory survey.

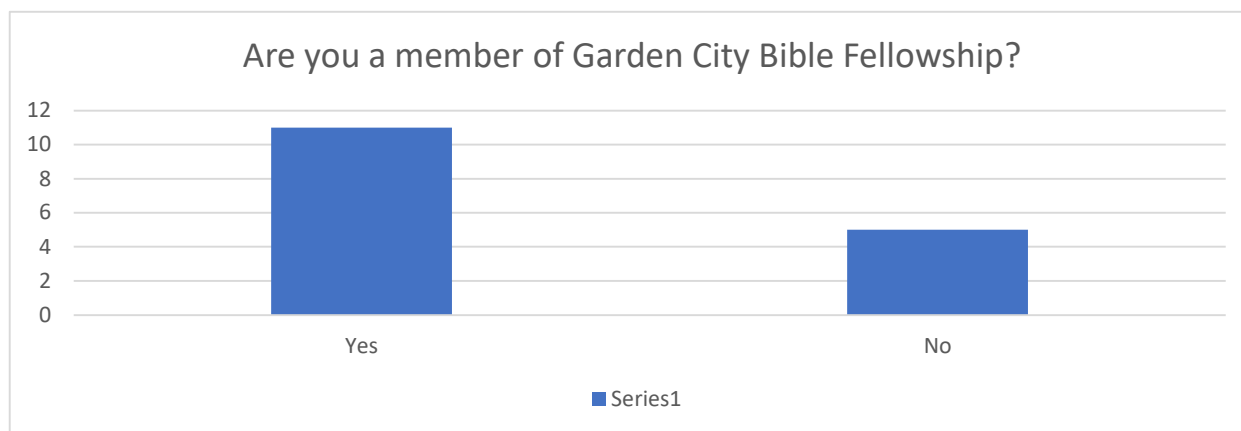


Figure 1.5

It should not be a surprise to see more than two-thirds of the participants being members of Garden City Bible Fellowship. To summarize to this point, approximately half of the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship participated in this intervention. Of these participants, the majority are elderly, female, and members of Garden City Bible Fellowship, demonstrating that the answers provided in these surveys should accurately reflect the general consensus of the entirety of Garden City Bible Fellowship. What is surprising is the number of participants who have participated in the Lord's Supper weekly in the past and the unanimity of their positive experience in the past. With this background information presented, the opinion questions regarding the Lord's Supper can be analyzed.

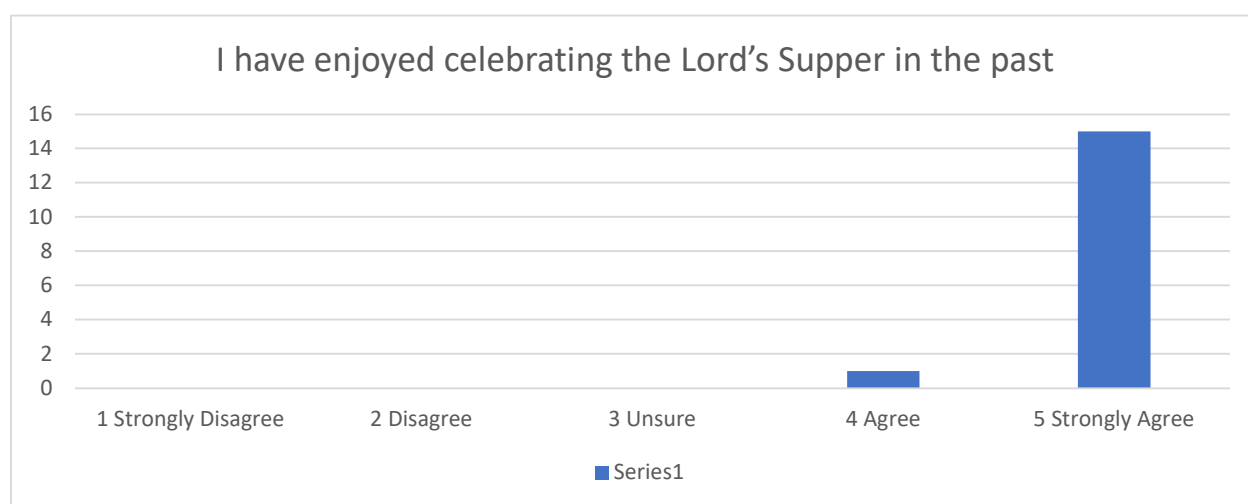


Figure 1.6

Unanimously, the participants of the introductory survey agree that celebrating the Lord's Supper has been an enjoyable experience in the past. This confirms the information presented in the Ministry Context, where it was observed that Garden City Bible Fellowship enjoys celebrating the Lord's Supper, though only on an irregular, intermittent basis. The answers to this question set the stage for this intervention to succeed, as there is no preexisting prejudice against the Lord's Supper. This is confirmed even more strongly by the responses to the next question.

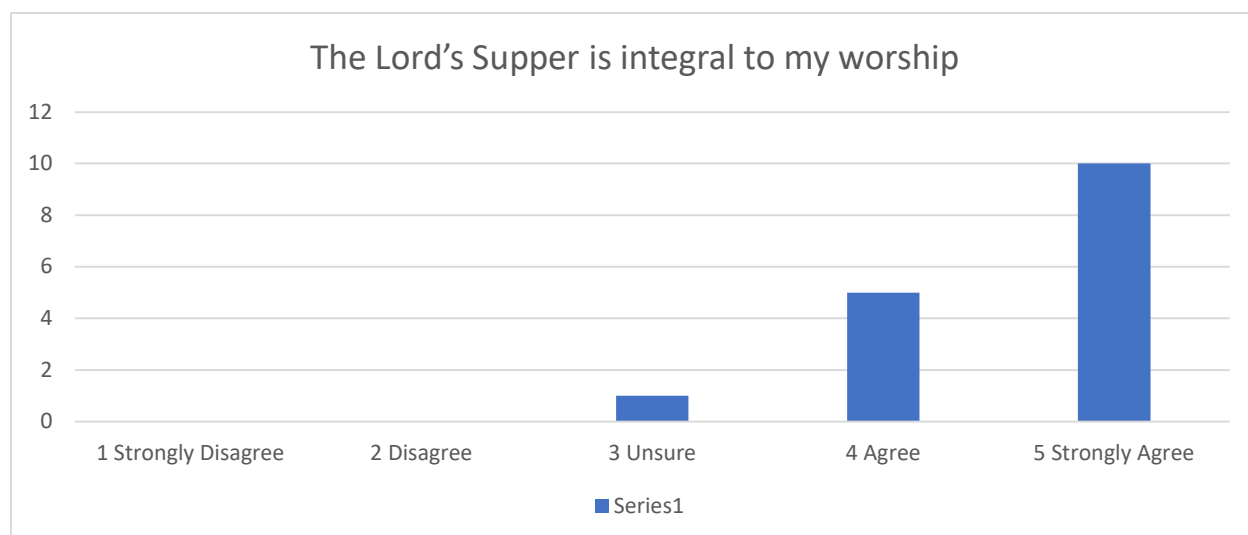


Figure 1.7

Almost unanimously, the participants agreed that the Lord's Supper is integral to their worship of God. Without the Lord's Supper, they would not be worshipping God to their desired extent. Once again, this shows that Garden City Bible Fellowship loves the Lord's Supper as an ordinance of the church and enjoys participating in it. The question is this: what is their opinion on the frequency of the Lord's Supper? This question is answered by the participants' answers to the next string of questions.

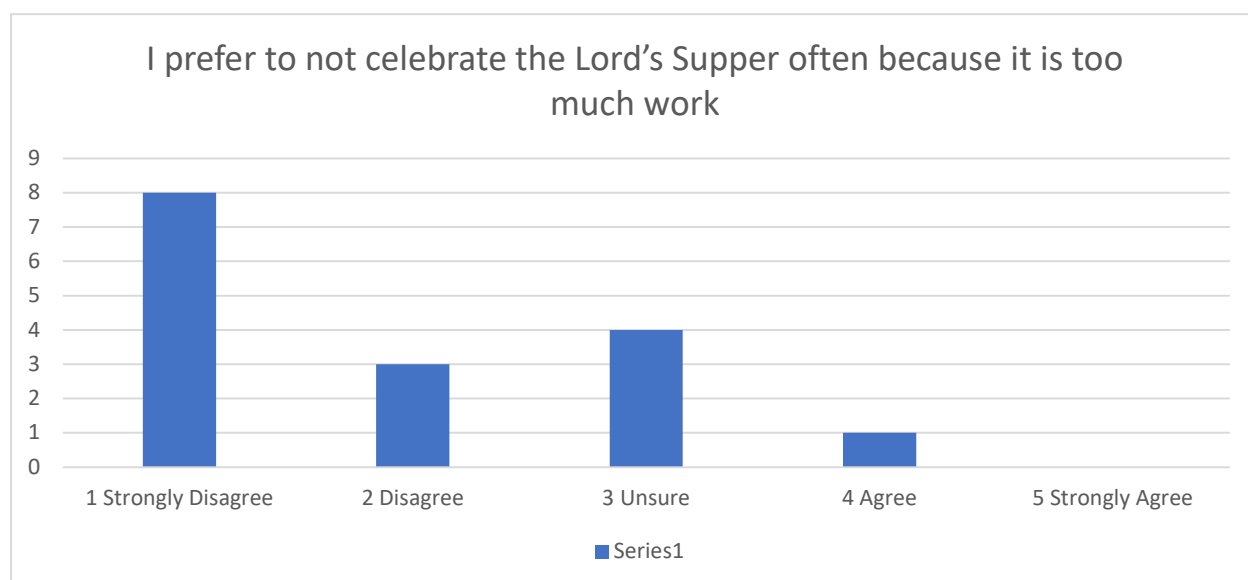


Figure 1.8

Interestingly, half of the participants strongly disagreed with this sentiment, and two-thirds disagree to any extent. This is surprising because, when seeking permission to institute this intervention, the elders and deacons of Garden City Bible Fellowship voiced their concerns. One such concern was that there is a commonly held opinion at Garden City Bible Fellowship that the Lord's Supper and its meal require too much work to prepare, so many people would not want to participate in this intervention. On the contrary, the introductory survey shows that at least initially only one person agreed that the Lord's Supper is too much work to celebrate often. This trend continues in the responses to the next question.

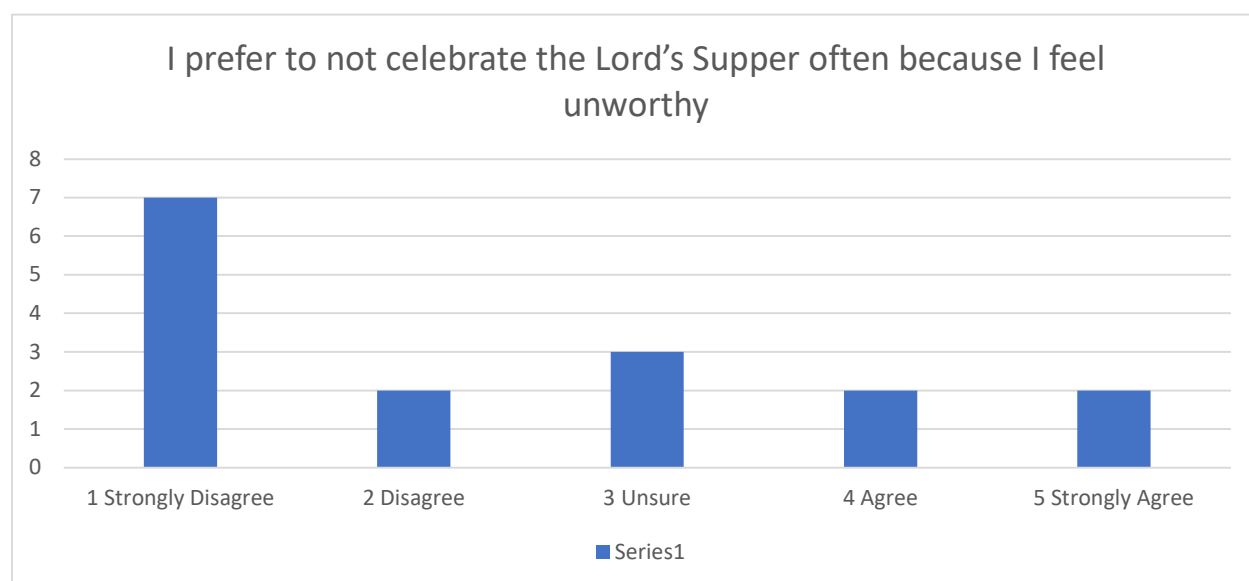


Figure 1.9

Once again, these results contradict the common objection that people feel too unworthy to participate in the Lord's Supper often. While more agree with this objection than the preceding objection, more than half of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. Where there is a dichotomy, and a strong dichotomy at that, is in the next objection.

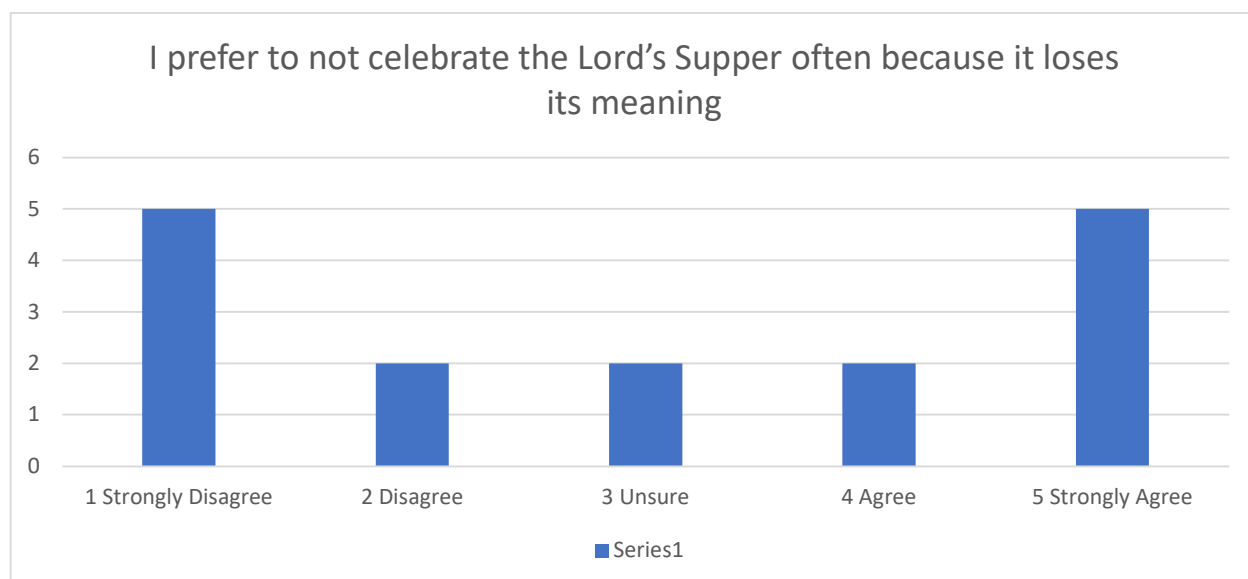


Figure 1.10

This was the most common objection cited in the preceding chapters, and it is the most common objection at Garden City Bible Fellowship. The results are literally split down the middle. The same number of participants agree and disagree with this objection. Consequently, it will be imperative to closely compare the responses to this question in the introductory survey with the responses to this question in the conclusory survey. The church is clearly split down the middle here as well as in the next question.

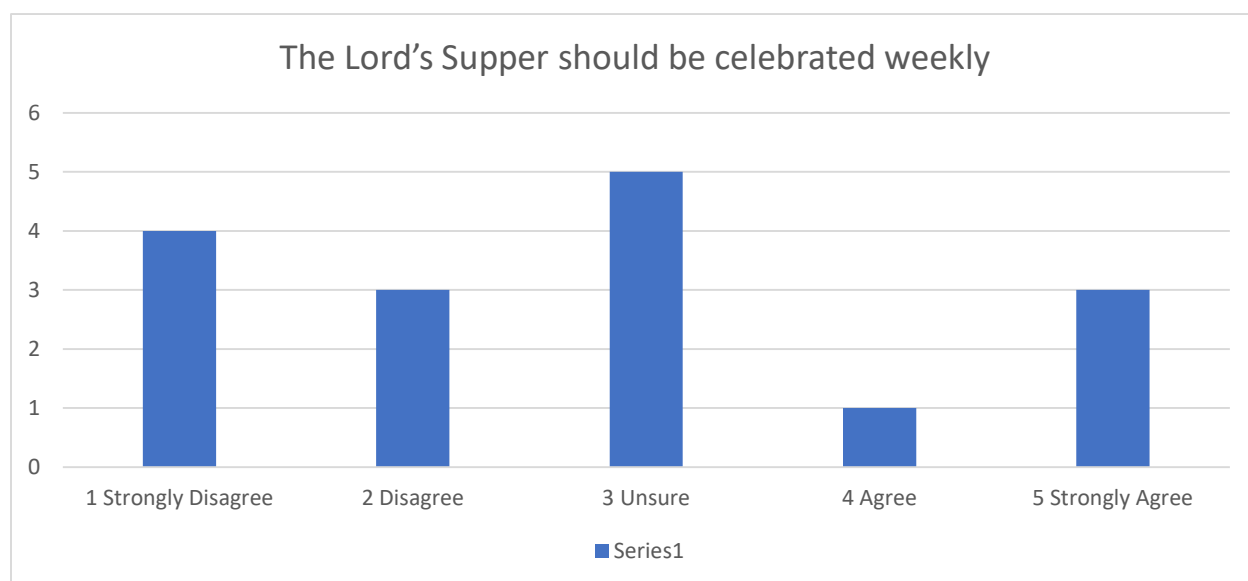


Figure 1.11

Once again, there is a clear split down the middle at Garden City Bible Fellowship regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper. However, unlike the preceding question, where the church was split between strong opinions, the church is largely split here due to ambivalence. They do not know how often the Lord's Supper should be celebrated. Therefore, this is another question whose results must be compared closely with the results of the conclusory survey. This is especially essential as there is a strong dichotomy between the elderly and youthful participants here. All the participants under the age of twenty-six agreed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly. However, no one over the age of fifty-five agreed. Consequently, this will be one of the primary developments to observe at the conclusion of this intervention. Interestingly, those who did not agree that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly are staunchly opposed to it be celebrated frequently in any way.

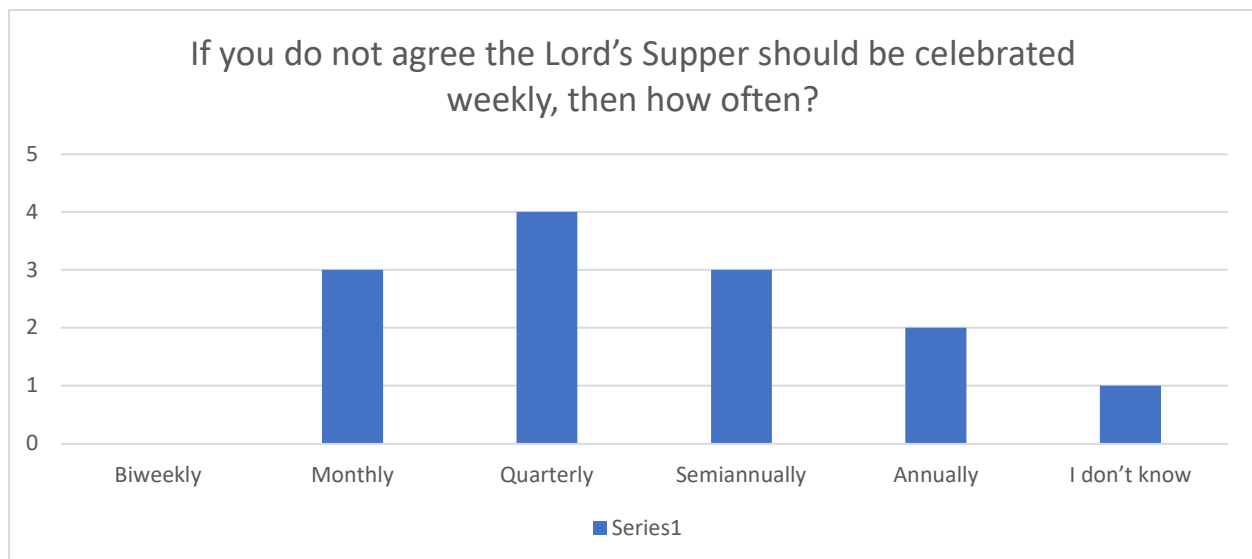


Figure 1.12

Not a single participant who disagreed that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly thought it should be celebrated biweekly either. This shows that at the outset, those who are opposed to celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly are against the concept of celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently in general. It will be interesting to explore how this compares to the results of the conclusory survey. However, this intervention not only pertains to the frequency of the Lord's Supper, but also the inclusion of a meal.

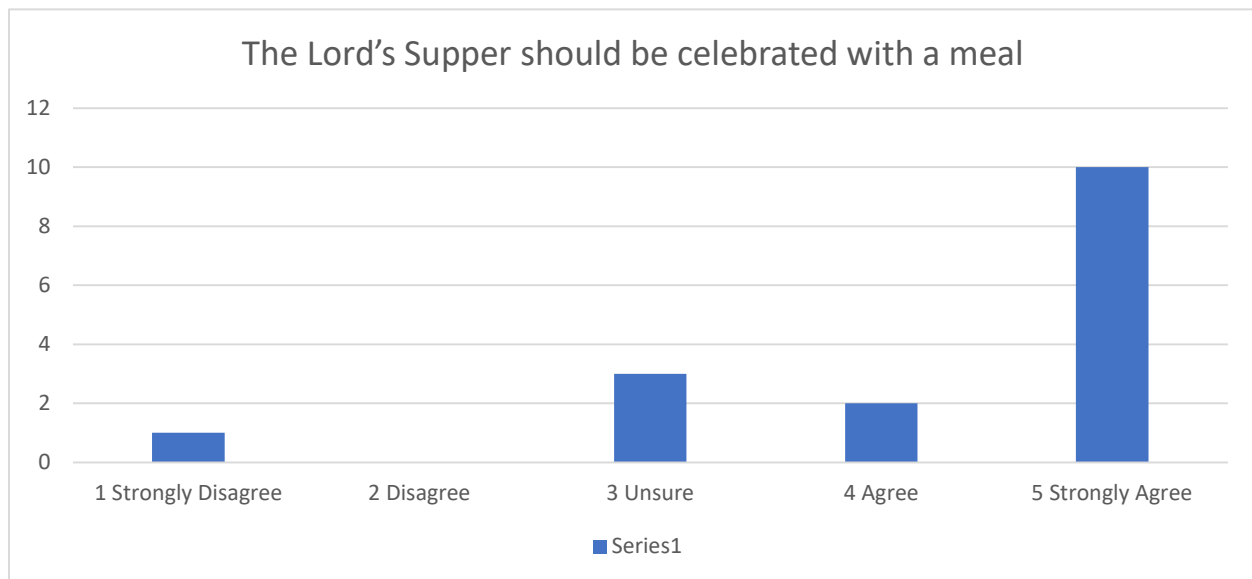


Figure 1.13

Clearly, Garden City Bible Fellowship already prefers to celebrate the Lord's Supper with a meal. Only one person disagreed, compared to twelve who agreed and three who are unsure. This sets the stage for the participants to enjoy the communal meals, as the participants prefer that these meals take place alongside the Lord's Supper. At this point, all that is left to analyze from the introductory survey are the primary measurements: fellowship and love.

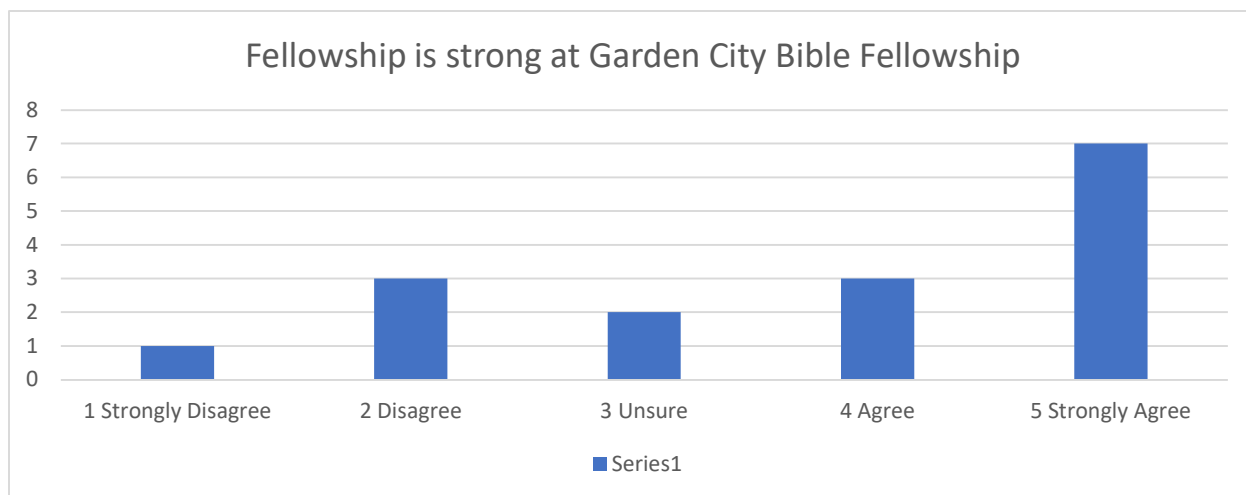


Figure 1.14

The introductory survey demonstrates that most agree fellowship is strong, though there is a minority who disagree with this sentiment. This leaves a small pool to observe an improvement in fellowship. What is important and unsurprising is the demographic of those who disagree with this statement. The four who disagree that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship are all under the age of sixty-five. In fact, not a single participant under the age of twenty-six agreed that fellowship is strong. This mirrors the observation made previously in the Ministry Context that there is a divide between the elderly and youthful attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship, and this divide is also apparent in the results of the next question.

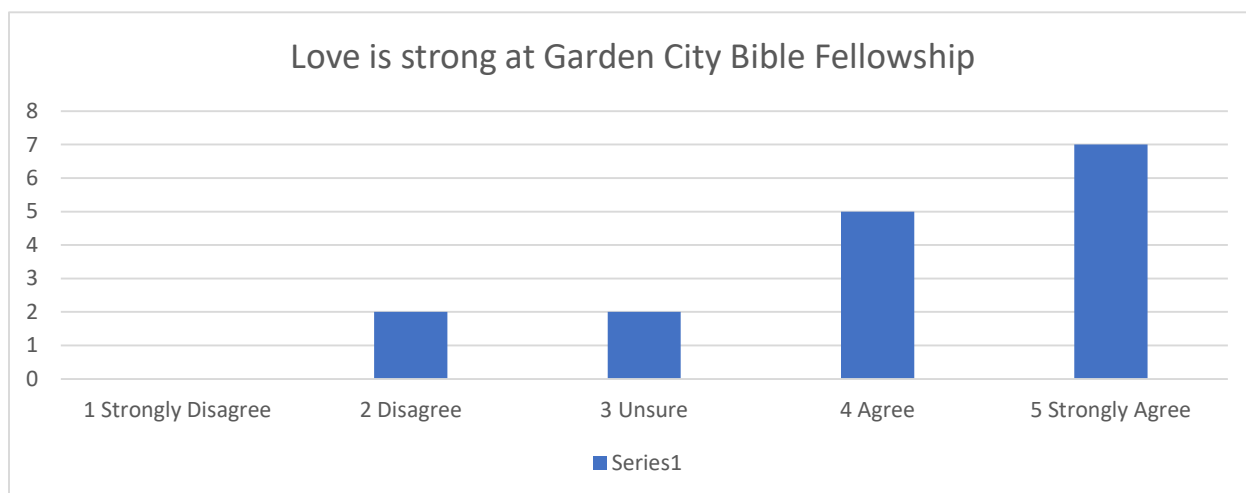


Figure 1.15

Once again, most participants agreed that love is strong, but those who disagreed or were unsure were under the age of twenty-six again. This sets the stage to test two, primary opinions and answer two primary questions. The first is this: Will the elderly participants switch to preferring to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly because of this intervention? The second is this: Will the youthful participants have stronger fellowship and love with the elderly because of this intervention? These questions are precisely what the conclusory survey will answer.

Conclusory Survey Results

To observe any themes or slippages, the results of the conclusory survey will be presented graphically in the form of a pie graph, which will demonstrate any themes and slippages as percentages, except for the background questions, which will remain bar graphs. Pie graphs with percentage values will be used since there is a discrepancy in the number of participants in the conclusory survey compared to the introductory survey, thereby making a pie graph the best visual representation of the data for most questions. However, this is not necessary for the first question, which once again pertains to age.

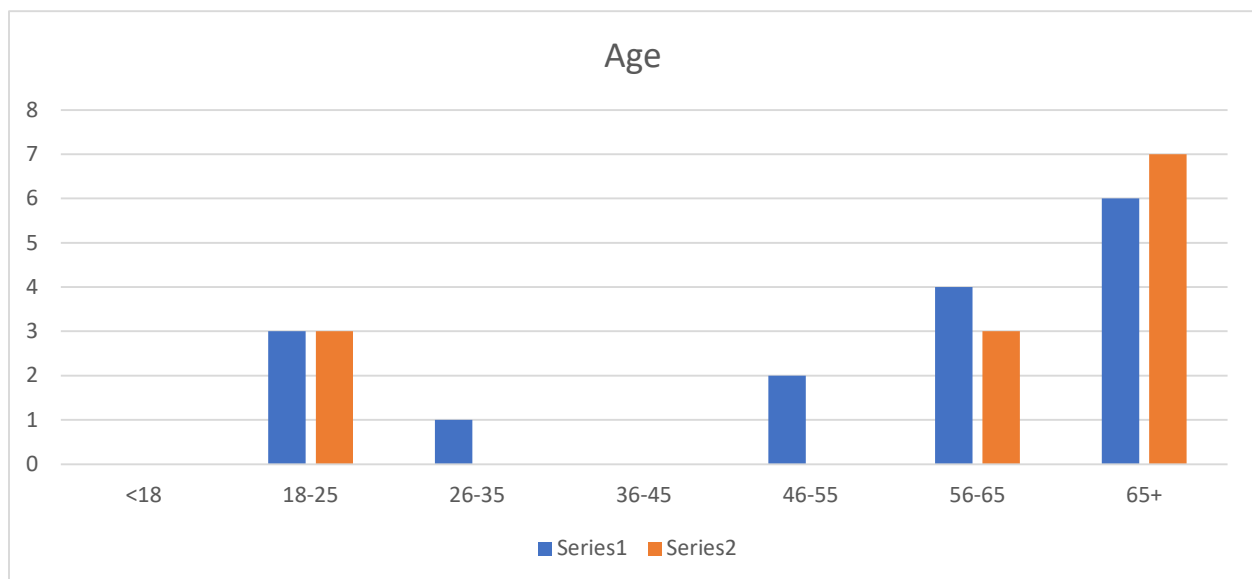


Figure 2.1

The first observation that must be made is the decrease in the number of participants. While sixteen attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship completed the introductory survey, only thirteen participated in enough communal meals to complete the conclusory survey. The identity of those who were unqualified to complete the conclusory survey is interesting. All three fell between twenty-six and fifty-five, the middle-aged participants. However, despite this demographic not being represented in the conclusory survey results, the two primary, contradicting demographics are still represented—the elderly and the youthful. Their answers can still be contrasted because all the elderly and youthful who completed the introductory survey were also able to complete the conclusory survey. It is noteworthy that one of the elderly participants either must have had his or her sixty-sixth birthday or is sixty-five and changed how he or she answered this question in the conclusory survey compared to the introductory survey because there was a decrease in the number participants between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-five and an increase in the number of participants over the age of sixty-five in the conclusory survey. Another interesting development pertains to the gender of the participants.

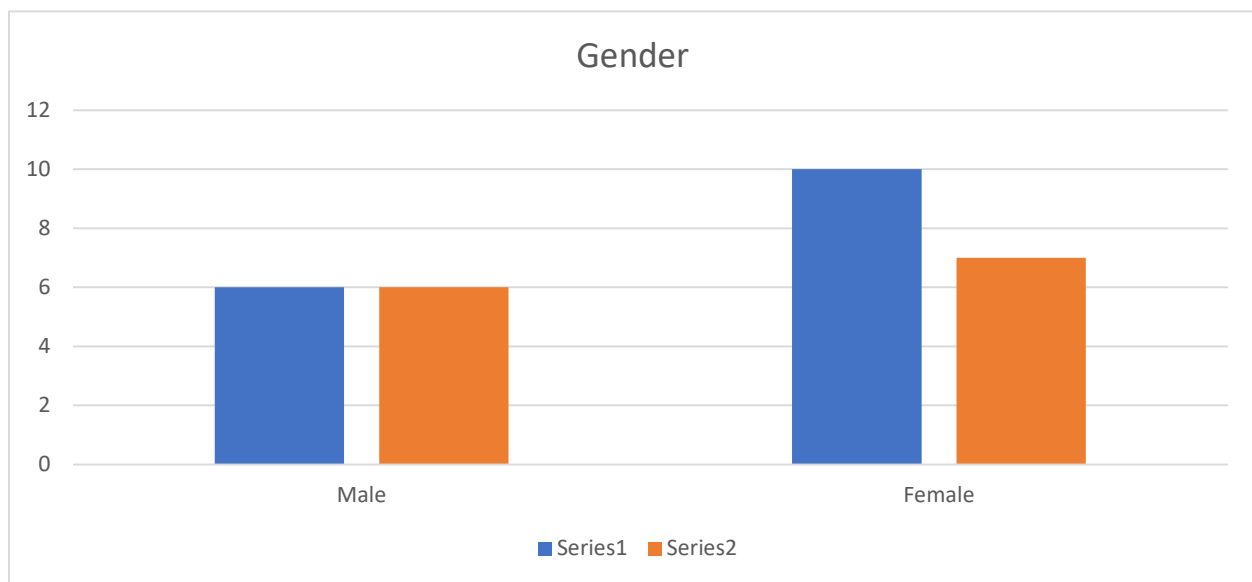


Figure 2.2

Not only were all the participants who completed the introductory survey but were unable to complete the conclusory survey middle-aged, but they were also all females. So far, the answers have been consistent, if interesting, but a discrepancy appears in the answers to the next question.

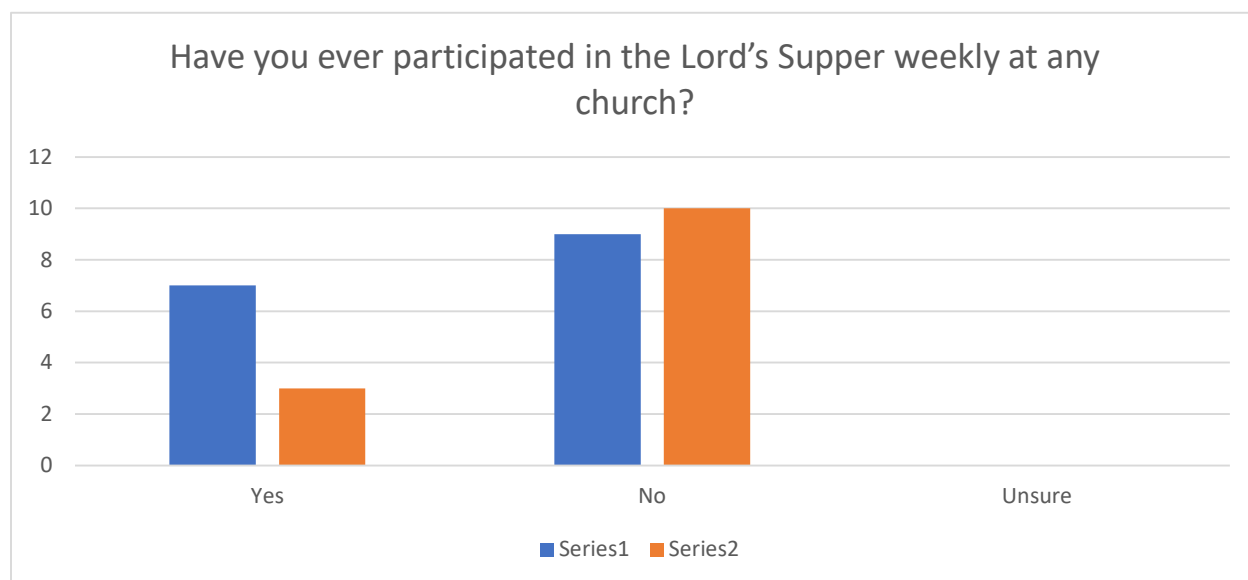


Figure 2.3

Not only were all the participants who completed the introductory survey but were unable to complete the conclusory survey middle-aged females, but they all had participated in the Lord's Supper weekly in some capacity in the past. This is the only way to explain the sharp decline in the number of affirmative answers to this question. However, even after subtracting three from the introductory survey results due to three fewer participants completing the conclusory survey, it does not explain how the number of positive responses to this question can decrease by four between the two surveys. This means someone answered affirmatively in the introductory survey but not in the conclusory survey, causing the discrepancy. However, there is no discrepancy in the unanimity of the responses to the next question.

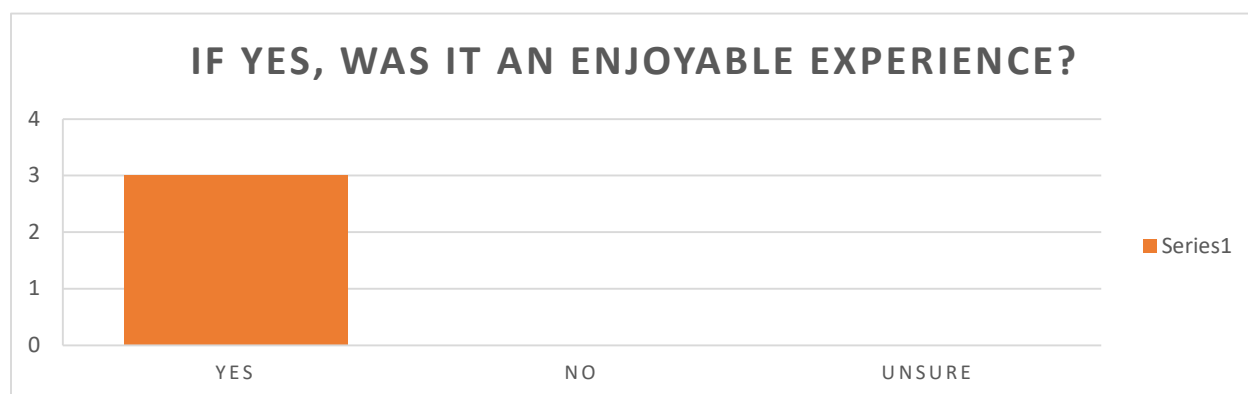


Figure 2.4

Despite the discrepancy in the preceding question, those who participated in the Lord's Supper weekly in the past continued to be consistent, affirming their enjoyable experiences in the past. This leaves one final preliminary, background question, which will reveal a final description of those who completed the introductory survey but were unable to complete the conclusory survey.

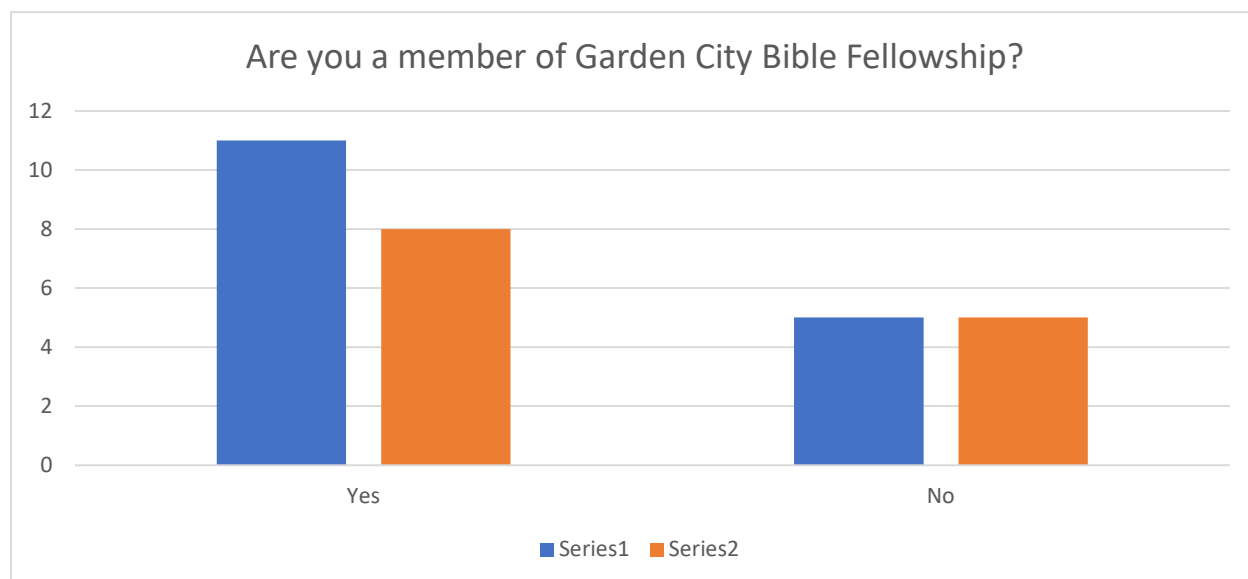


Figure 2.5

Not only were all the participants who completed the introductory survey but were unable to complete the conclusory survey middle-aged females who had celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly in the past, but they also were all members of Garden City Bible Fellowship. This is particularly surprising, as one would expect the members of Garden City Bible Fellowship to be the more consistent participants in the Lord's Supper during this intervention due to their assumed commitment. With the preliminary observations made, the final results can be analyzed.

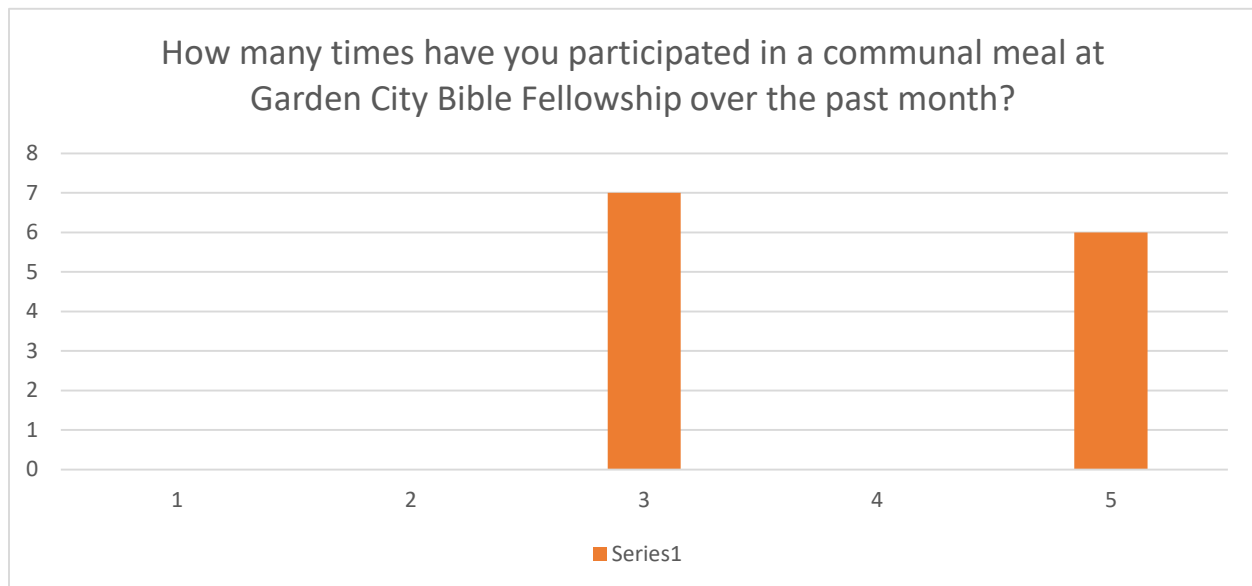


Figure 2.6

Thankfully, for the purposes of this intervention, there was fairly good participation. Almost half of the thirteen participants who qualified to complete the conclusory survey participated in all five of the communal meals. This makes the following answers more likely to be educated answers based on consistent experience, beginning with the simplest question of all.

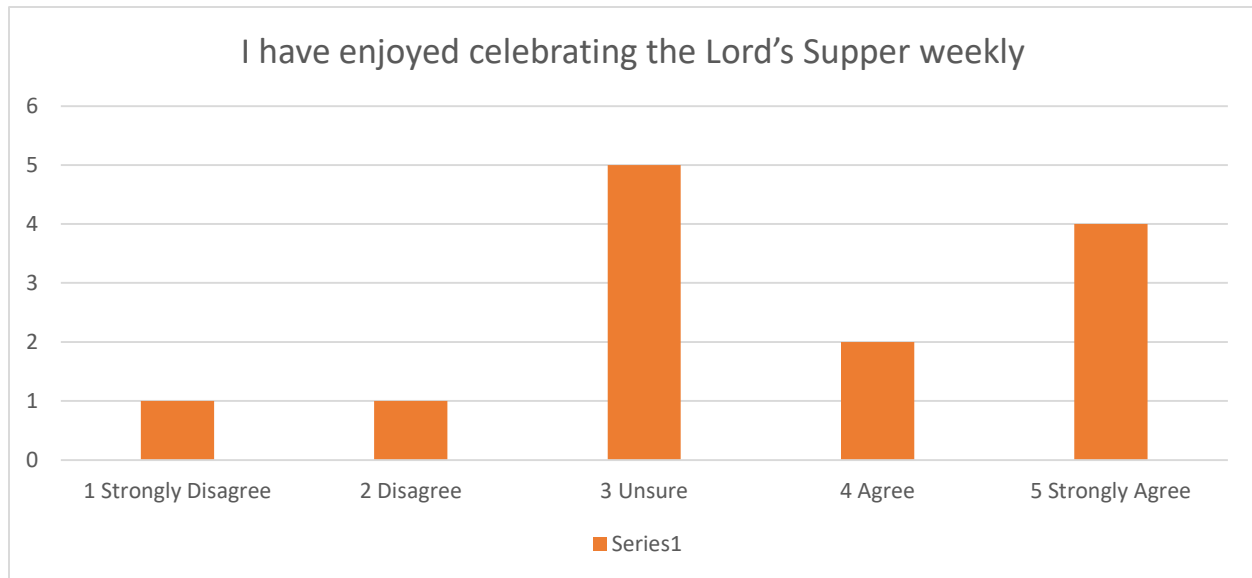


Figure 2.7

At the most basic level, the participants were unsure about this question. Approximately half enjoyed the experience, while the other half were mostly unsure. When analyzed by age, the responses are unsurprising. The youthful participants under the age of twenty-six responded unanimously that they strongly agree the experience was enjoyable. Of the ten participants over the age of fifty-five, three agreed the experience was enjoyable. Five of the elderly were unsure, and two disagreed. This shows that the elderly were almost evenly split regarding their experience. What the participants mostly agreed on, regardless of their age, was whether or not the Lord's Supper is integral to their worship.

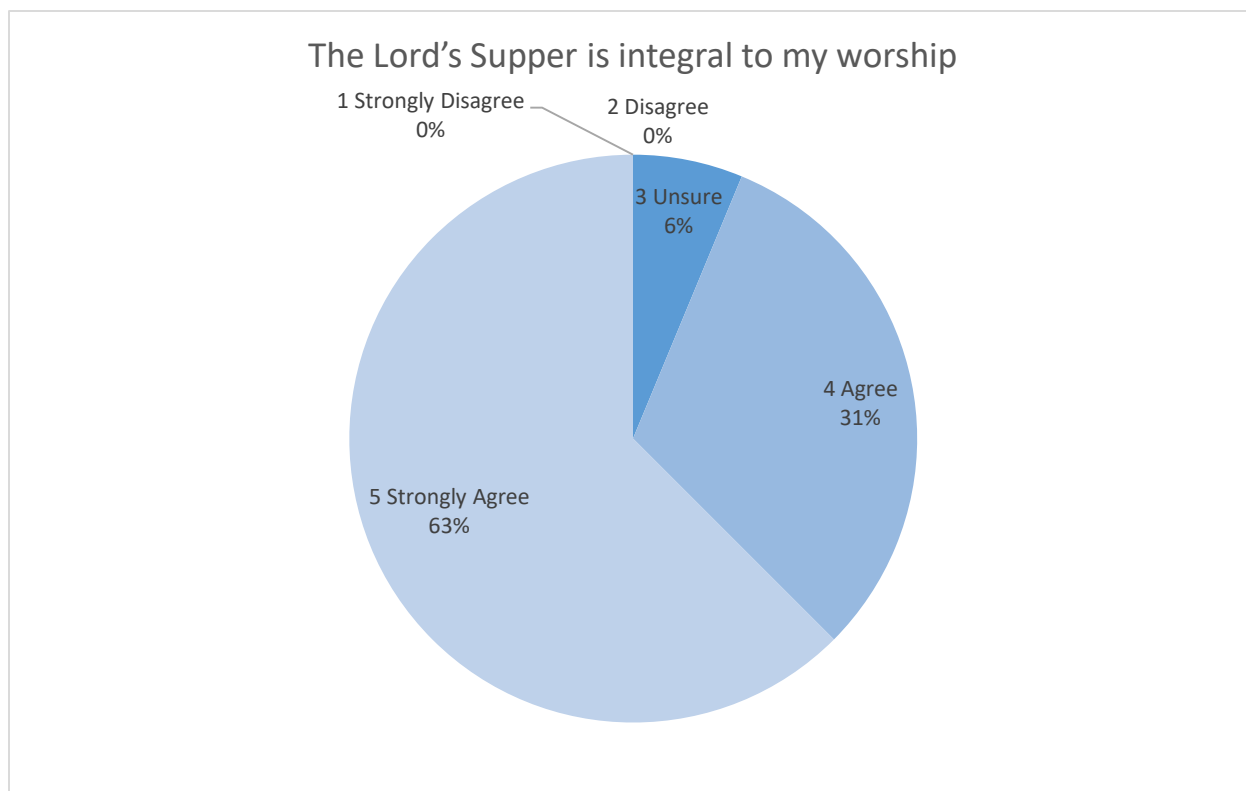


Figure 2.8

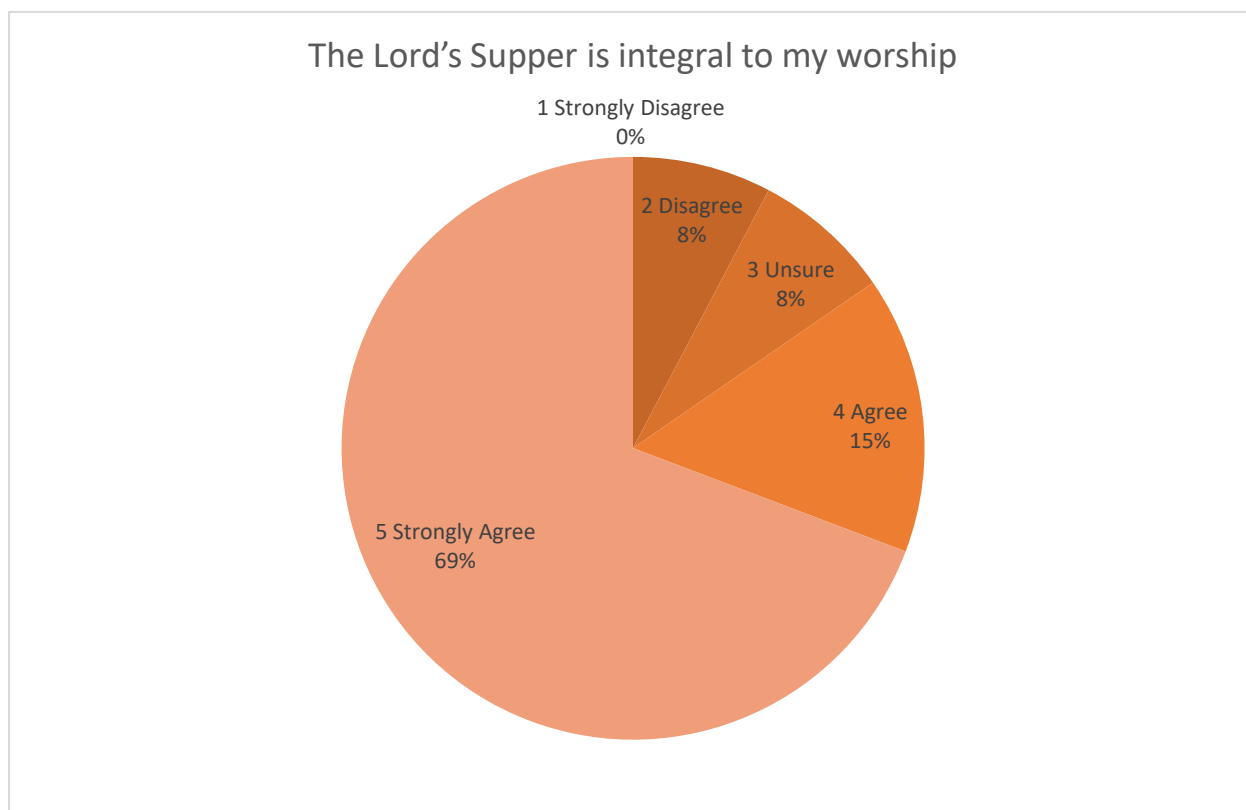


Figure 2.9

While the vast majority of participants concluded this intervention agreeing that the Lord's Supper is integral to their worship, there was actually a slight slippage between surveys. In the introductory survey, not a single participant disagreed with this statement. In the conclusory survey, one disagreed with this statement. This shows that one of the elderly participants, after celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, realized that it is not as integral to her worship of God as she once thought. The person who changed their opinion is an elderly woman, and there is another elderly woman who lowered her opinion of the Lord's Supper as well. In the introductory survey, the single participant who answered that he is unsure whether the Lord's Supper is integral to his worship was a male between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-five. In the conclusory survey, the single participant who answered that she is unsure whether the Lord's Supper is integral to her worship is a female between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-five. Therefore, two elderly women changed their opinion of the Lord's Supper to be less integral to their worship. However, the aforementioned male must have come to see the Lord's Supper as more integral to his worship because no males disagreed with or were unsure about this statement. Once again, the youthful participants maintained a high view of the Lord's Supper, but the opinions of the elderly were less conclusive.

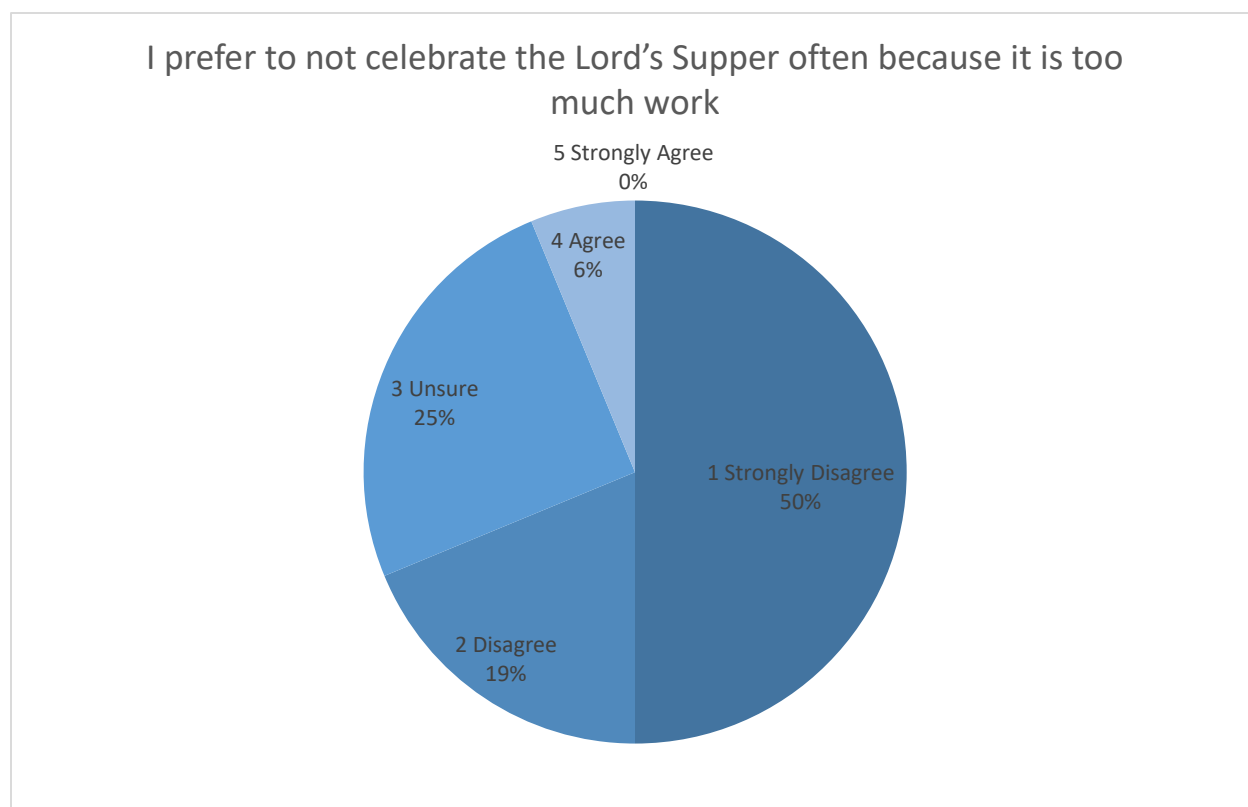


Figure 2.10

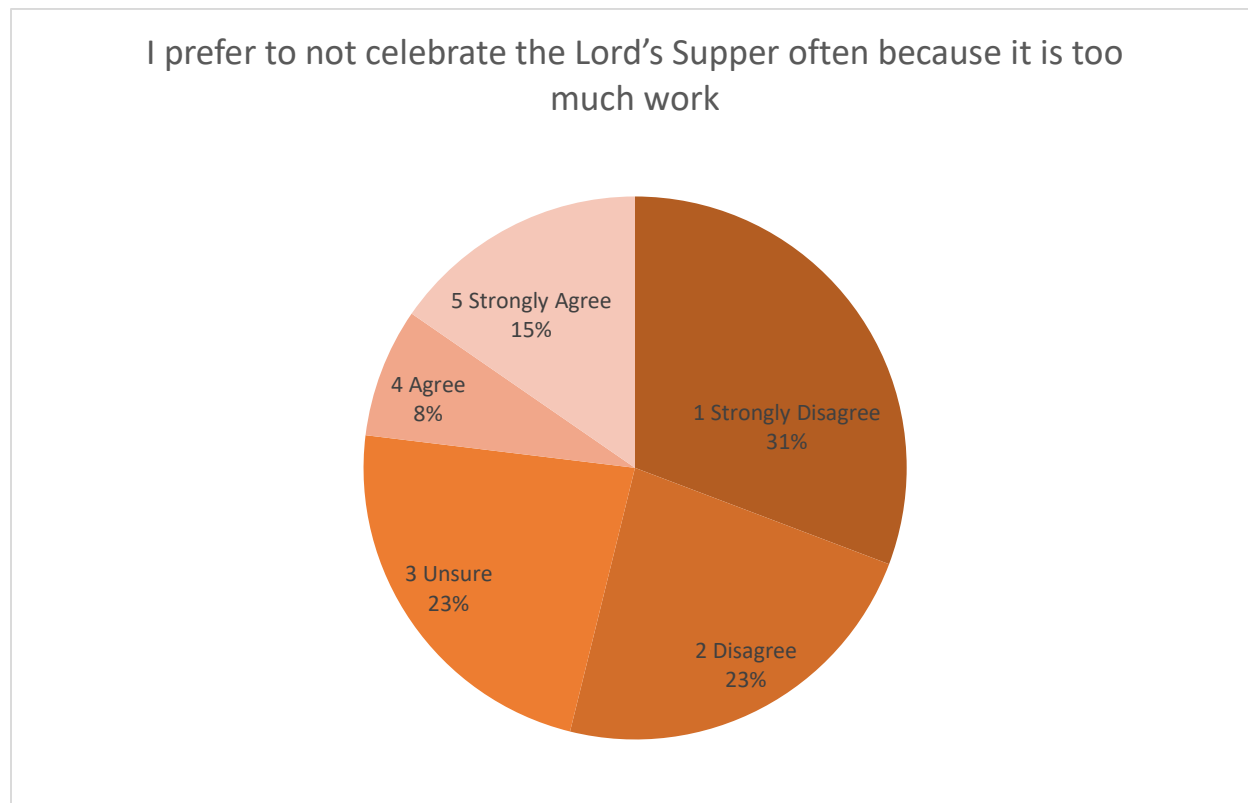


Figure 2.11

There is a tangible theme regarding this common objection to celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. In the introductory survey, only one person agreed that the Lord's Supper with a meal is too much work to celebrate often. However, in the conclusory survey, three participants agreed or strongly agreed, marking a 17% increase. As expected, the three participants who agree that the Lord's Supper is too much work to be celebrated weekly fall into the elderly demographic. The responses to this question reveal that two people, after celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, realized that they actually do not want to celebrate the Lord's Supper with a meal often due to the amount of work involved, changing their opinion for the conclusory survey. This development indicates that this common objection, that the Lord's Supper is too much work to celebrate often, is present in Garden City Bible Fellowship's attendees, although in a minority. While more participants concluded this intervention agreeing with this objection, the opposite is true for the next objection.

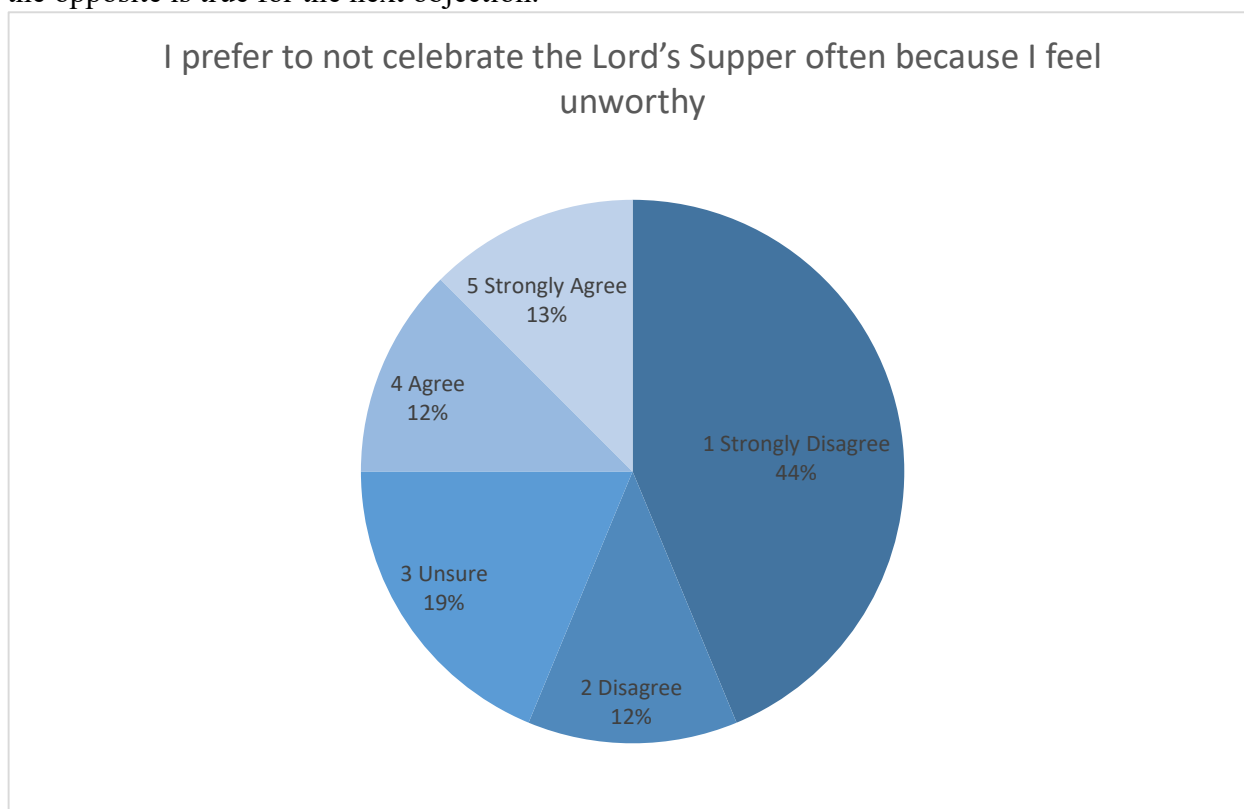


Figure 2.12

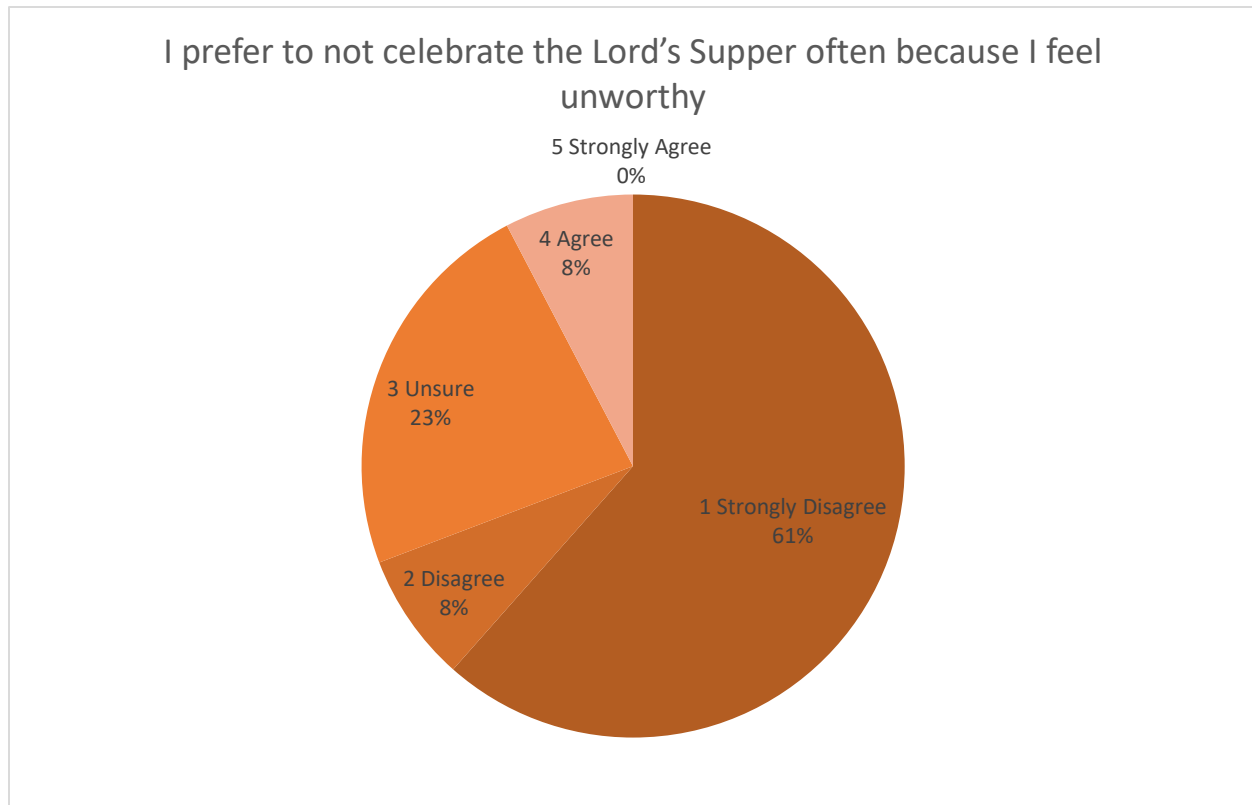


Figure 2.13

After participating in the Lord's Supper weekly, there was a decrease in the number of participants who feel unworthy to participate in the Lord's Supper often. Specifically, there is a 13% increase in participants who disagree or strongly disagree that they feel too unworthy to celebrate the Lord's Supper often. It is also noteworthy that of the 69% of participants who disagreed, all but one strongly disagreed, showing that their opinions are strong on this matter. On the other hand, there is a 17% decrease in the participants who agree that they feel too unworthy to participate often, and none strongly agree with this sentiment. Furthermore, the number of participants who remained unsure was consistent. Therefore, one can conclude that this intervention caused many participants to realize that they are not too unworthy to celebrate the Lord's Supper often, debunking this common objection.

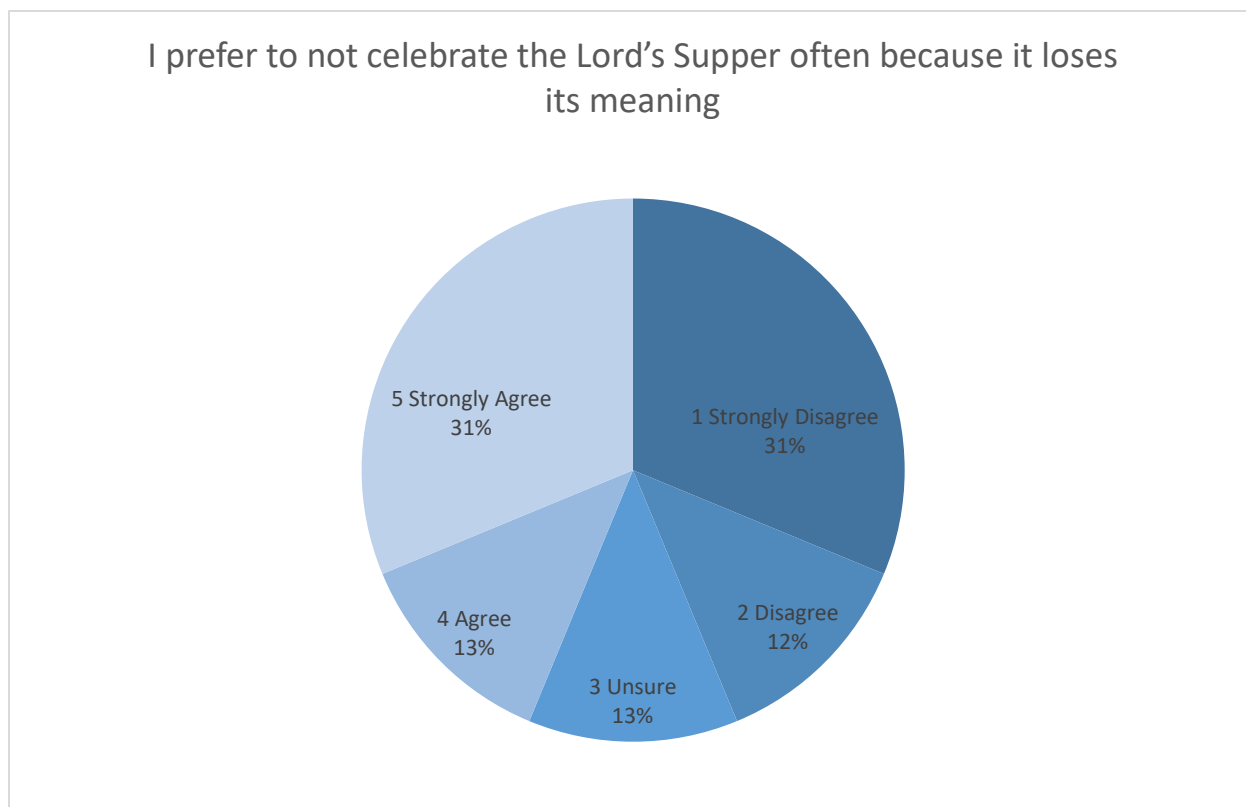


Figure 2.14

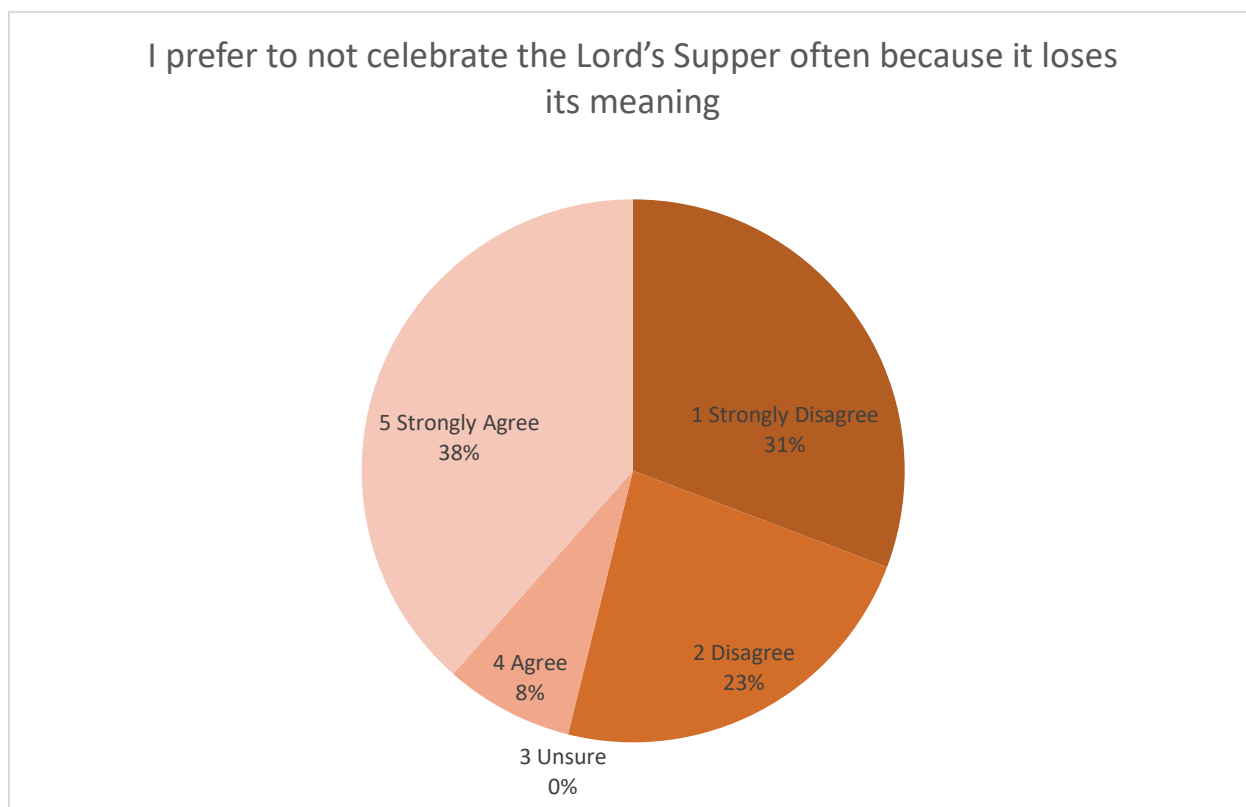


Figure 2.15

The results to this common objection to celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, that higher frequency results in lower significance, are polarizing. Not a single participant of the conclusory survey is unsure regarding this subject. Everyone either agrees or disagrees. When comparing the two surveys, the percentage of participants who agree or strongly agree with this objection remained consistent between the introductory and conclusory surveys, 44% and 46%, respectively. This implies that the 13% of the participants who were unsure how to answer this question in the introductory survey concluded this intervention disagreeing with this objection. The responses to this question show that those who were on the fence about celebrating the Lord's Supper often because it could lose its meaning concluded that the Lord's Supper does not lose its meaning when celebrated weekly. However, for those who already had opinions when answering the introductory survey, those opinions remained true when completing the conclusory survey, and once again, the participants who agree with this objection fall exclusively in the elderly demographic. At this point, now that the participants' responses to the common objections to celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly have been analyzed, the specific questions regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper and the inclusion of a communal meal are next.

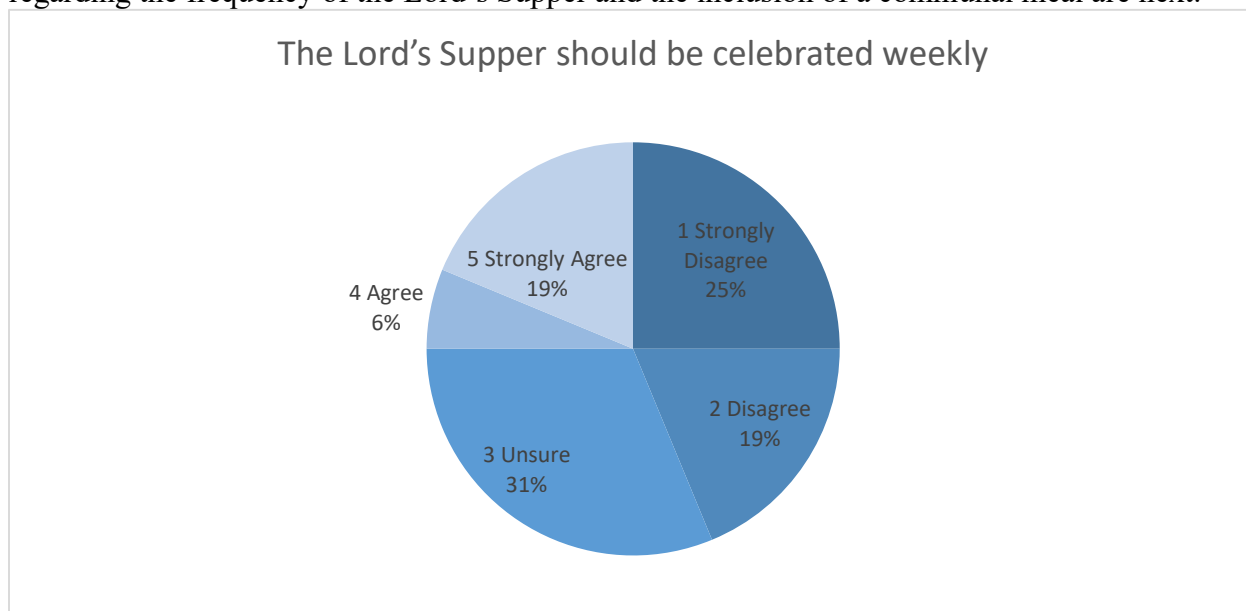


Figure 2.16

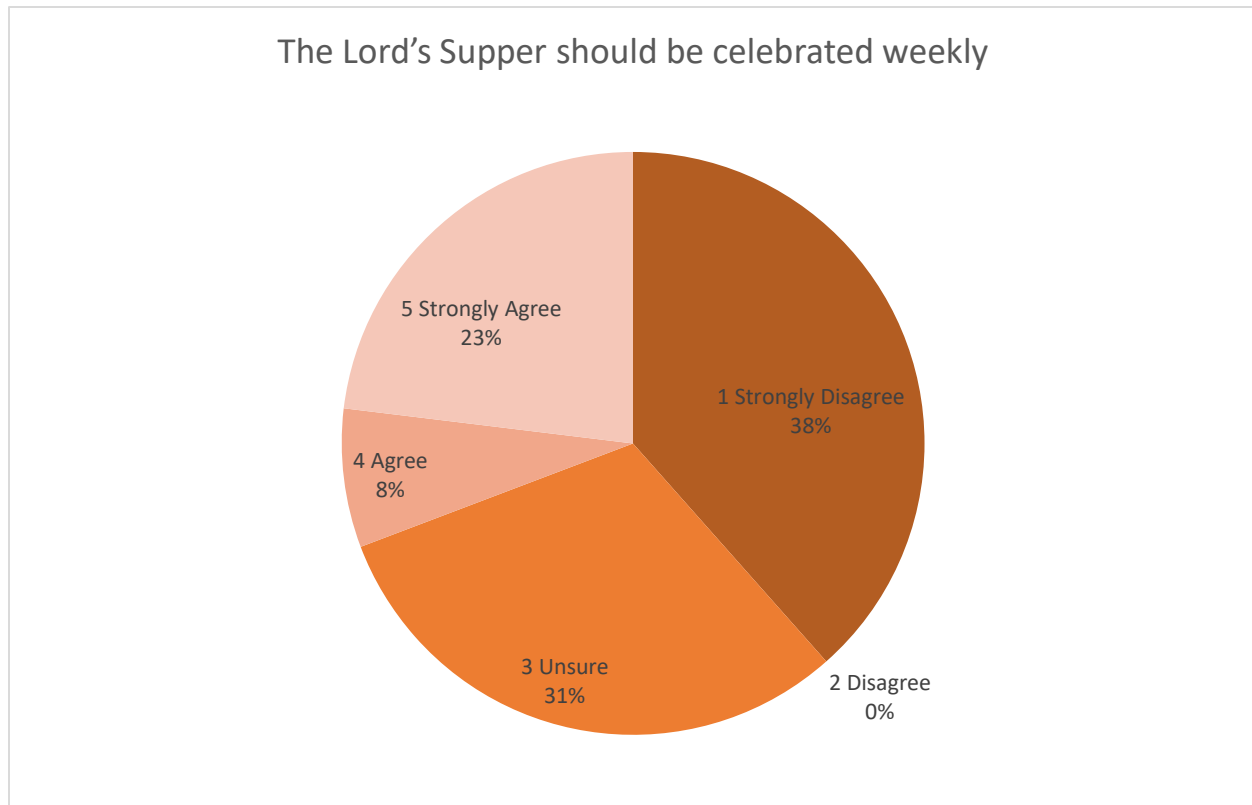


Figure 2.17

Once again, the responses to this statement are polarizing in the conclusory survey but remain largely unchanged between the two surveys. In fact, the percentage of participants who were unsure in the introductory survey about the frequency of the Lord's Supper remains the same in the conclusory survey, that is, 31%. However, when examined numerically, the results show that one person changed his opinion on the frequency of the Lord's Supper, which explains the 6% increase in those who agree or strongly agree the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly. While this falls below the anticipated 10% increase, it does show that an elderly participant benefited by celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly to the point that he desires to celebrate it weekly. The rest of the participants maintained their previous opinion and seemed to have strengthened these opinions because there is a significant increase in the number of participants who strongly disagree, rather than merely disagree, that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly. This staunchness is reflected in the responses to the next question as well.

If you do not agree the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly, then how often?

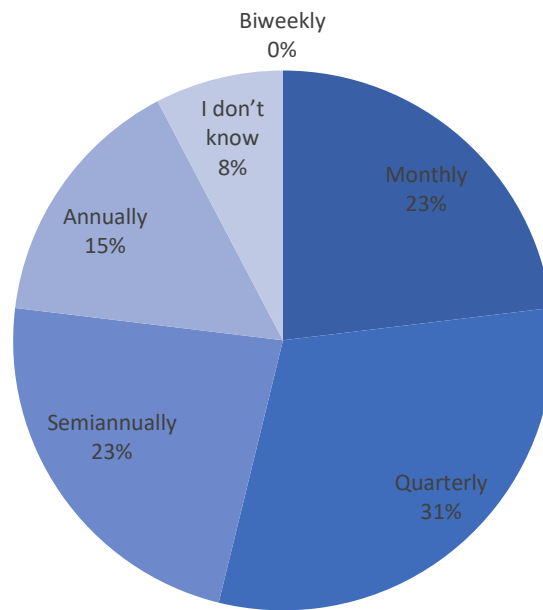


Figure 2.18

If you do not agree the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly, then how often?

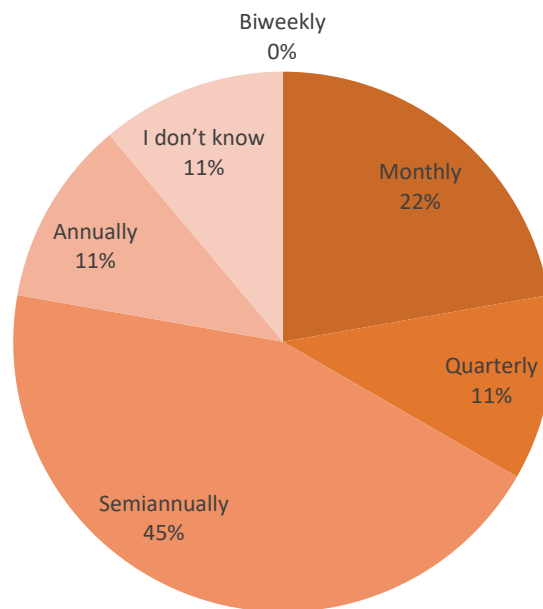


Figure 2.19

For those who do not desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, their desired frequency decreased after celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. The number of participants who desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper quarterly decreased by 20% because of this intervention. These 20% now desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper semiannually because the number of participants who prefer to celebrate the Lord's Supper semiannually increased by 22% from the introductory survey to the conclusory survey. Therefore, it is clear that those who entered this intervention predisposed against celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly not only maintained this opinion (with one aforementioned exception), but many strengthened their opinion by lowering their preferred frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper from quarterly to semiannually. A theme is now developing with few exceptions. The participants in this intervention mostly maintained their original opinion, but the few who changed their mind did so in favor of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly. This leaves the other half of the intervention, the inclusion of a communal meal.

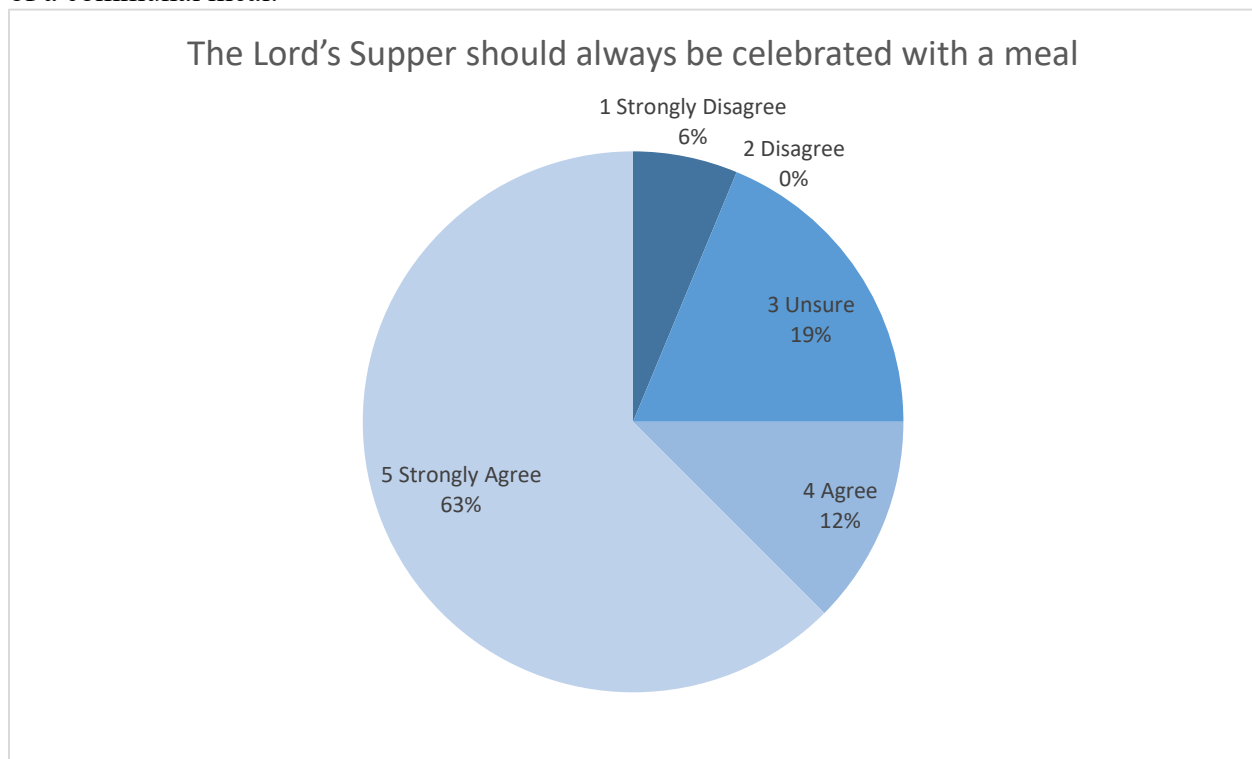


Figure 2.20

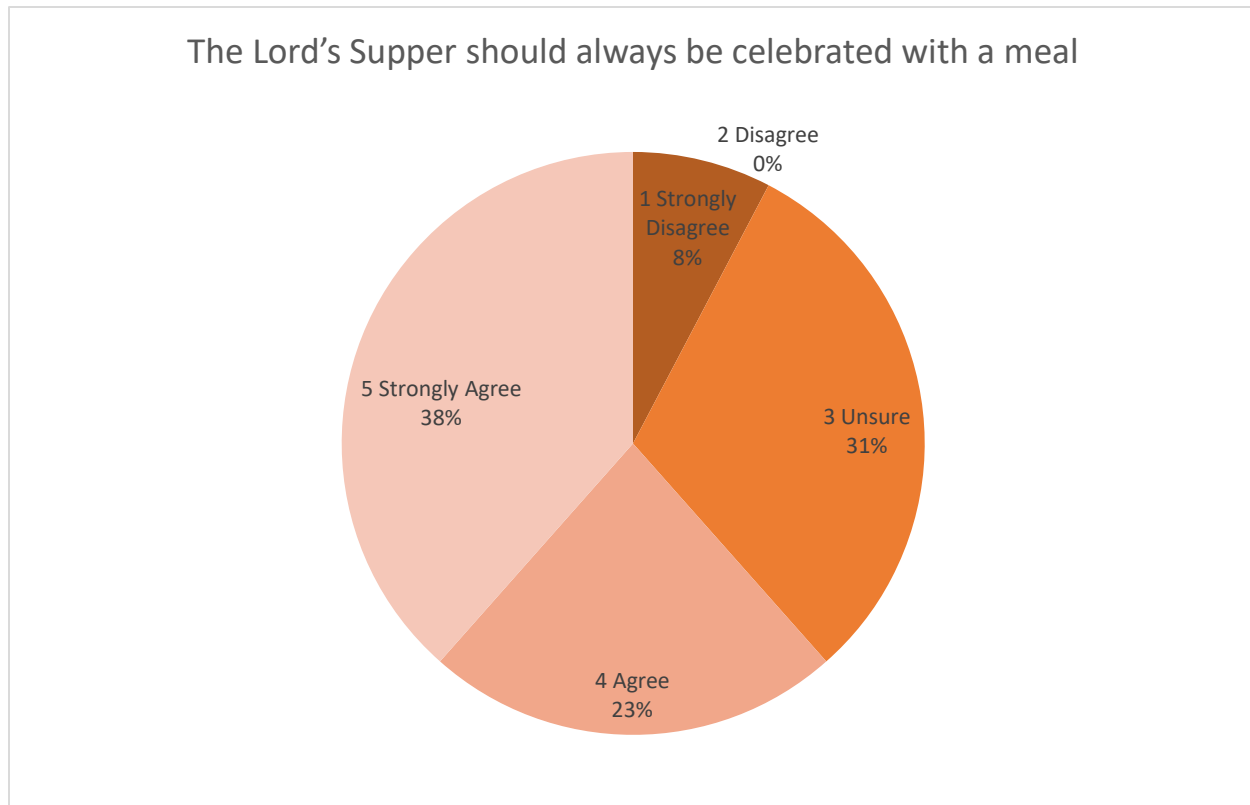


Figure 2.21

After participating in a communal meal for many weeks, the participants' opinion of including a communal meal with the Lord's Supper changed in an interesting manner. The number of participants who disagree or strongly disagree with this statement remains consistent, with only one in opposition. However, there was a 14% decrease from 75% to 61% of participants who agree that the Lord's Supper should always include a communal meal. Consequently, there was a 19% increase in participants who are unsure whether the Lord's Supper should include a communal meal. Those whose opinions changed on this subject fall into the elderly demographic. Therefore, this intervention caused many of the participants to question the inclusion of a communal meal when celebrating the Lord's Supper, though not to the point that these participants think the meal should not happen. Rather, they are unsure. At this point, it is necessary to analyze the tangible benefits of this intervention, which was not merely meant to change people's minds, but to improve fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship.

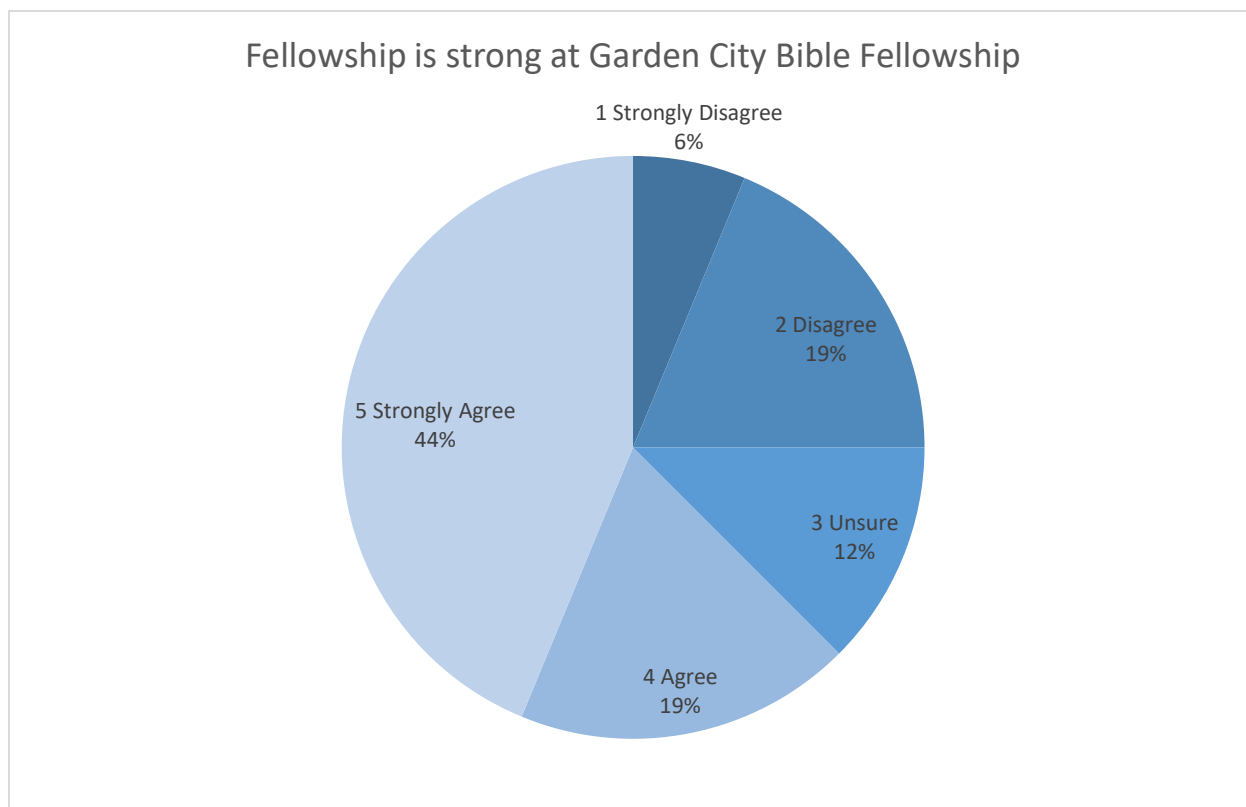


Figure 2.22

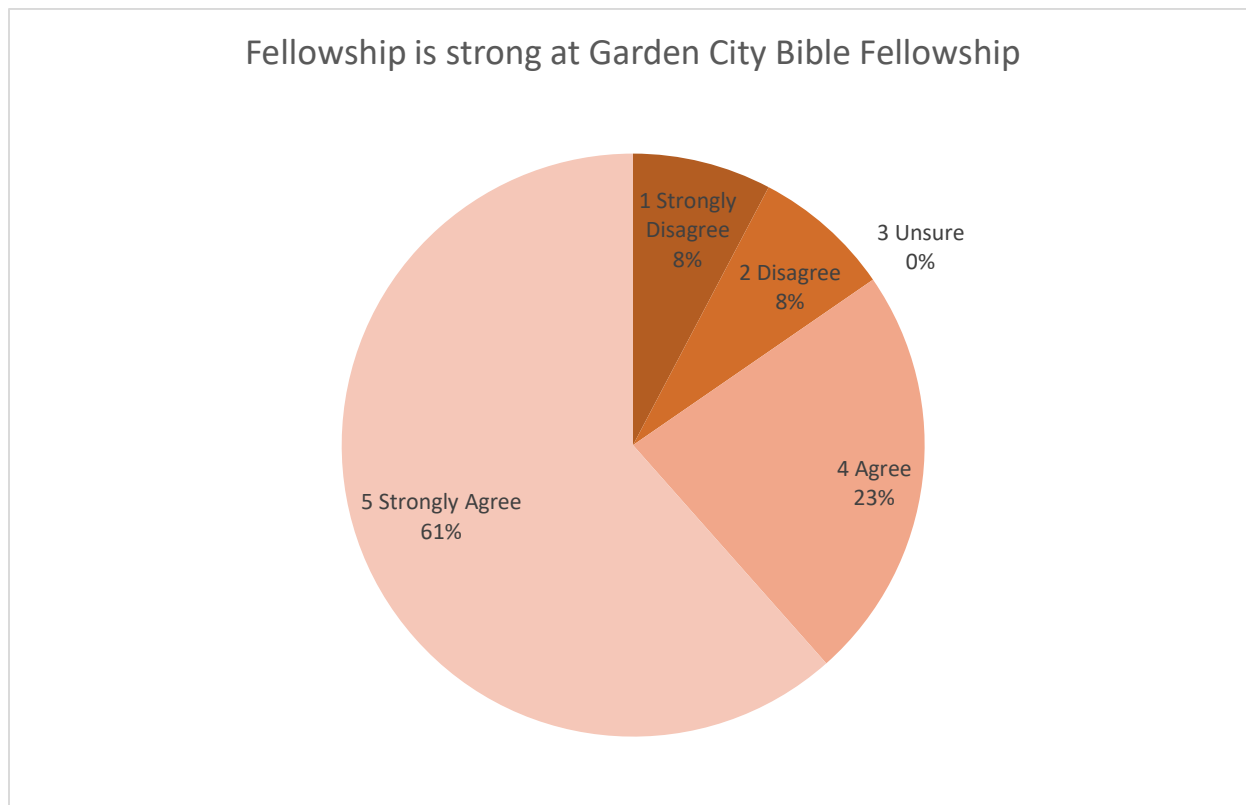


Figure 2.23

This is where the impact of this intervention is most evident. This intervention was intended to increase fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship in a tangible way, and that is exactly what happened. There was a 9% decrease in those who disagree that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship from the introductory survey to the conclusory survey. Furthermore, of all those who were unsure, they now agree or strongly agree that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship, resulting in a 21% increase in the number of participants who agree that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship. This change can primarily be attributed to the youthful demographic. None agreed that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship in the introductory survey, but now all them agree that fellowship is strong. Therefore, this intervention succeeded and accomplished one of the primary goals, which was to bridge the gap between the elderly and the youthful at Garden City Bible Fellowship.

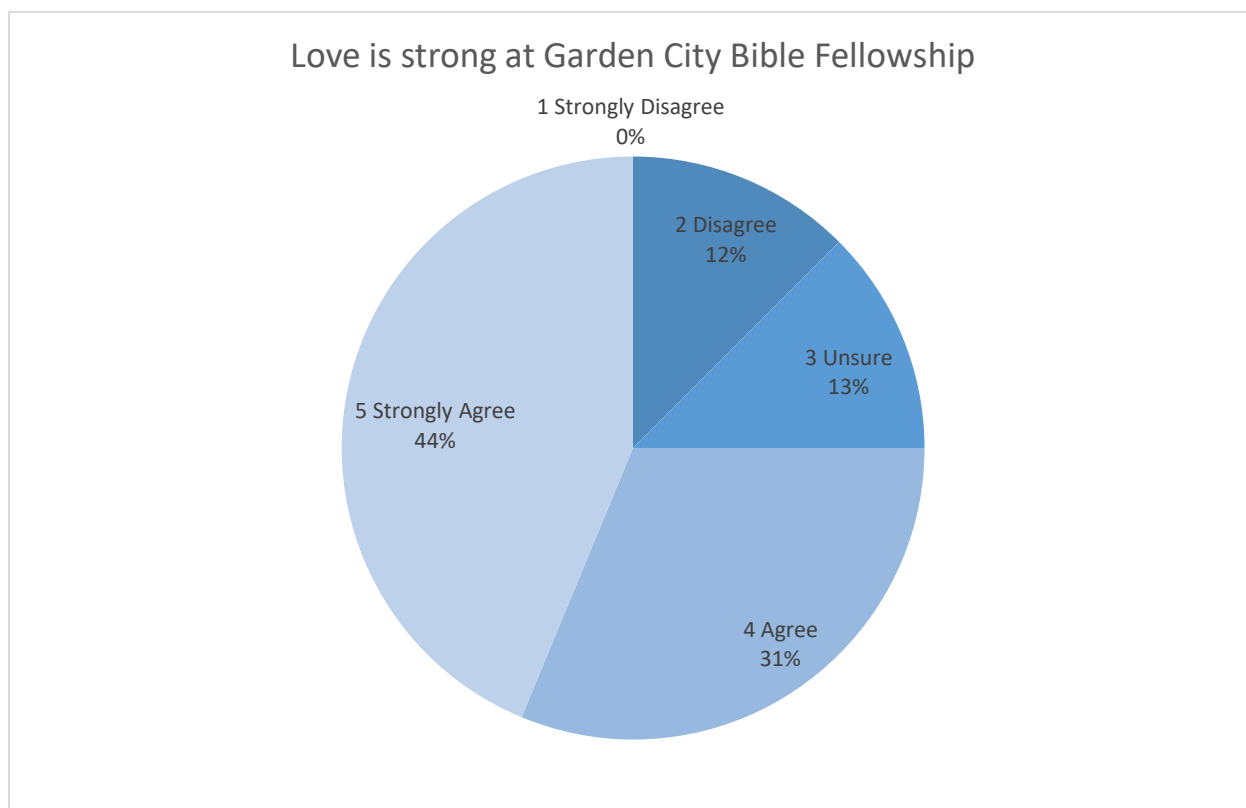


Figure 2.24

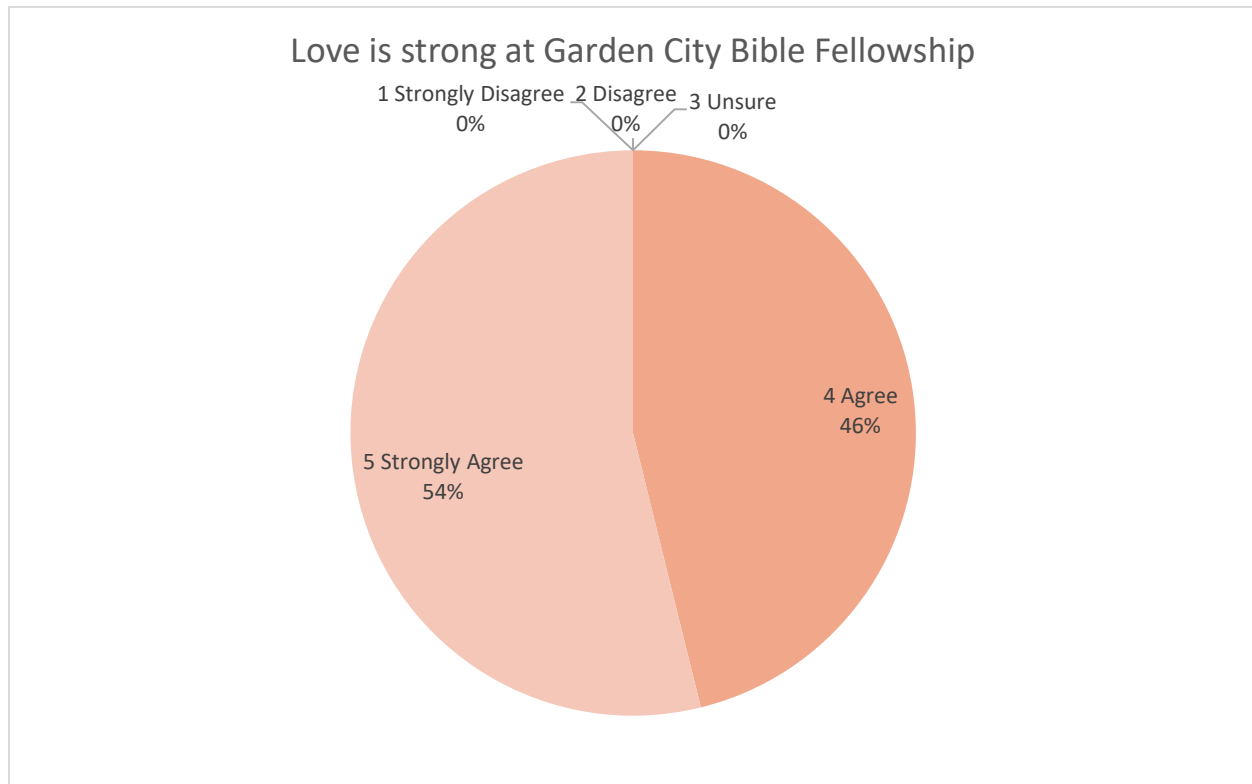


Figure 2.25

These charts demonstrate once again that this intervention accomplished its intended purpose. 25% of participants were unsure or disagreed that love is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship in the introductory survey, but in the conclusory survey, there was unanimity. Everyone agreed that love is strong. Once again, the change primarily occurred among the youthful demographic. Even though there was only a 6% increase in the number of participants who believe that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly and a 14% decrease in the number of participants who believe that the Lord's Supper should include a communal meal, there was a 25% increase in love and a 21% increase in fellowship. The participants might not agree with the method, but celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal for five weeks resulted in a significant increase in fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship. This is reflected in the more personal questions that concluded the conclusory survey.

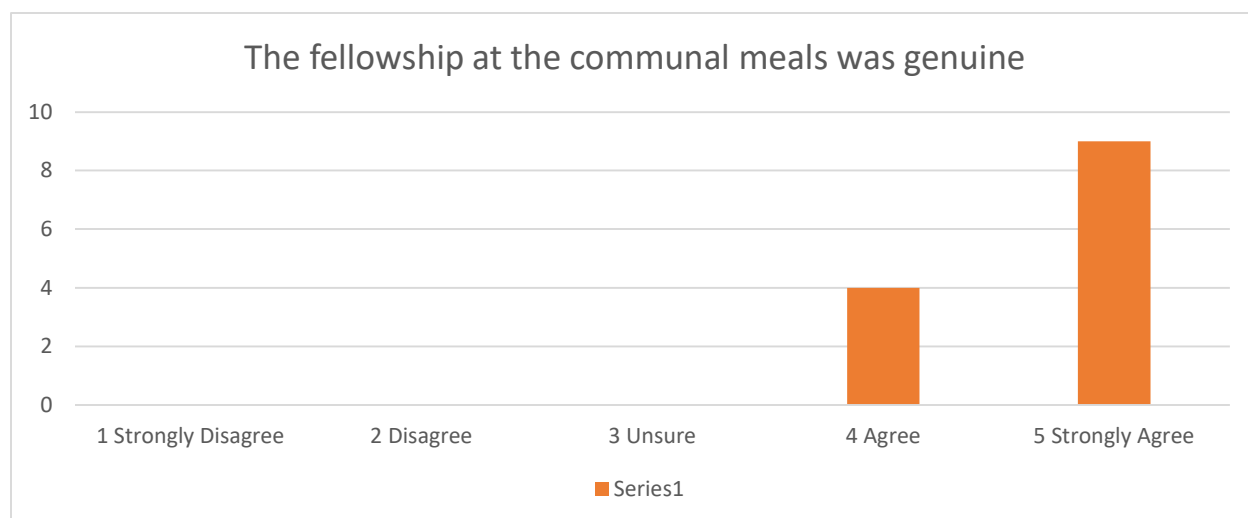


Figure 2.26

Not a single participant thought that the fellowship experienced during the communal meals was disingenuous. Even those who do not think the Lord's Supper should always include a communal meal think that the fellowship at these communal meals was genuine. Therefore, it is not surprising to see such a sharp increase in fellowship after this intervention since the fellowship was actual biblical fellowship. Since the fellowship was entirely genuine, it is unsurprising that many individual participants became closer to other participants.

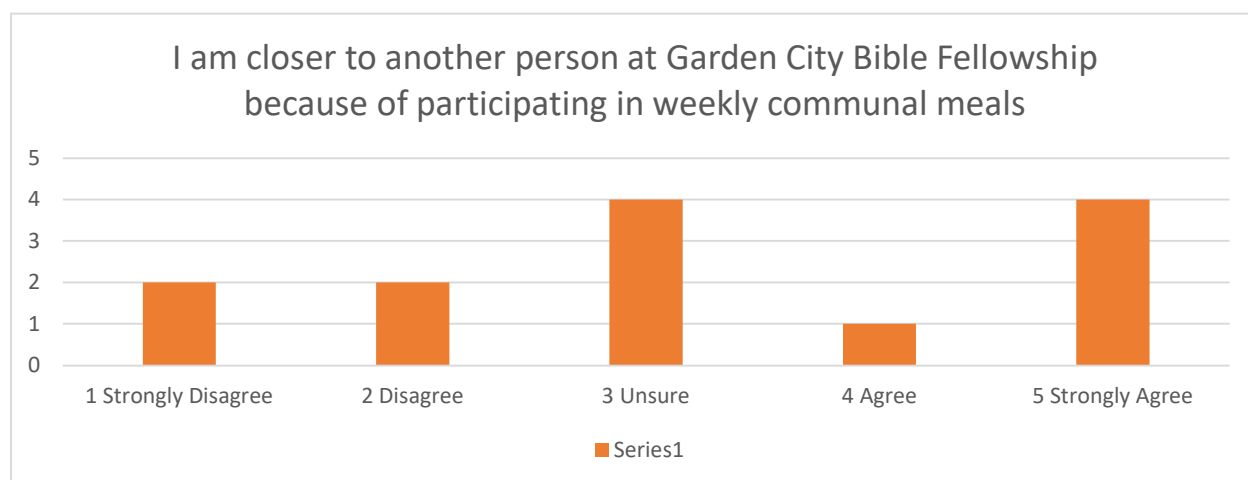


Figure 2.27

Five of the thirteen participants who completed the conclusory survey agree or strongly agree that they are closer to someone else who participated because of these communal meals. This number might be lower than anticipated, especially in light of the answers to the previous questions, but it is still a significant number. This is especially true when the surveys were analyzed, and these five participants were identified. Of these five, three were from the youthful demographic. Every single participant under the age of twenty-six agreed or strongly agreed that he or she is closer to another participant. Therefore, this intervention caused the youthful participants to feel closer to the elderly participants, even if the majority of the elderly participants did not reciprocate and feel closer to the youthful. While this intervention was implemented to strengthen the fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, the preceding sections demonstrated that true fellowship with other Christians is only possible when there is fellowship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, the conclusory survey concluded with this final statement.

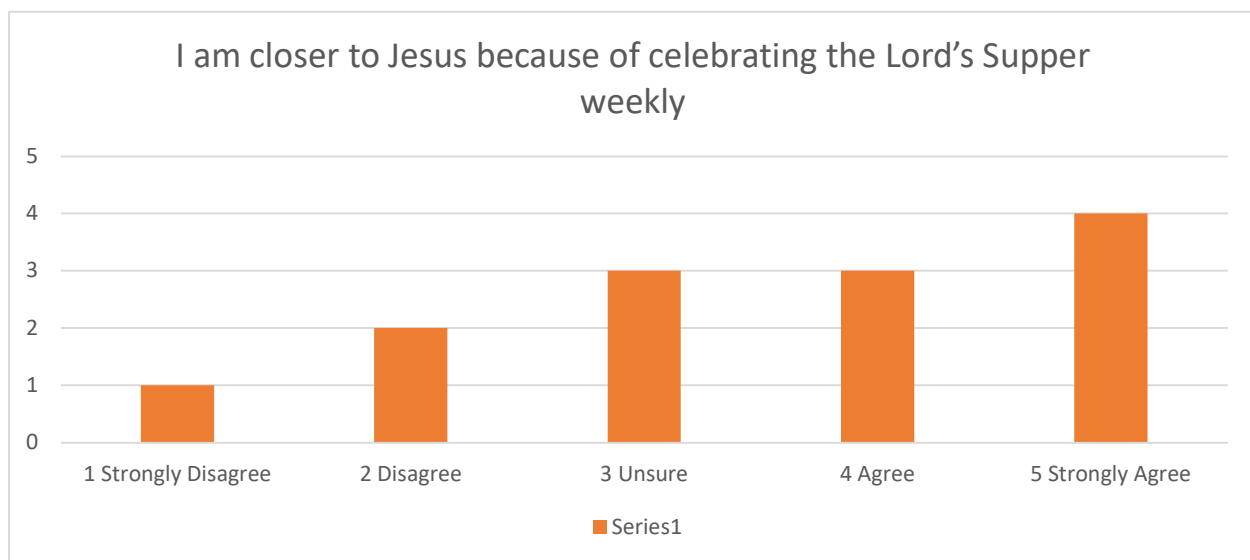


Figure 2.28

The majority—seven out of thirteen—of the participants who completed the conclusory survey agree or strongly agree that they are closer to Jesus because they celebrated the Lord's

Supper weekly. While this still leaves a sizable minority who are either unsure or disagree with this statement, this final question demonstrates that this intervention is spiritually beneficial for the participants, just as the previous research projects deduced in Chapter Two. Celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal not only improves the participants' love and fellowship with one another, but also their love and fellowship with Jesus.

The statistical results of the introductory and conclusory surveys are telling. With regard to their opinions of the Lord's Supper, the participants' opinions technically changed negatively on many levels. Ultimately, a smaller percentage of participants saw the Lord's Supper as integral to their worship. A larger percentage of participants saw the Lord's Supper as being too much work to celebrate often. A smaller percentage of participants prefer to celebrate the Lord's Supper with a communal meal, and less than a majority became closer to one another by participating in this project. However, many of the participants' opinions changed positively. Ultimately, a smaller percentage of participants felt too unworthy to celebrate the Lord's Supper often. A larger percentage of participants prefer to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, and the majority became closer to Jesus by participating in this project. However, most importantly, fellowship and love improved tangibly among the participants. Therefore, this intervention successfully addressed the problem and yielded the expected results in the areas of love and fellowship. Fellowship and love improved by 20-25% each, which is much higher than the anticipated 10%. While there was only a 6% increase in the number of participants who desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly and a 14% decrease in the number of participants who desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper with a meal (both lower than expected), most participants became closer to Jesus, and just under half became closer to one another. Overall, the intervention yielded the expected results. With all the data presented, many conclusions are evident.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

By now, the results and implications of this study should be self-evident. All research provides conclusions of significance and shows whether or not the data supports the thesis of the project, and this study is no different. The significance of this study does not exist within a vacuum, and the conclusions will either support or contradict the previous research on this topic. Most important, however, are the benefits and applications of the research, because research that is applied in the field will undoubtedly produce many applications and benefits for not only the target audience of the study (in this case, Garden City Bible Fellowship), but also for other contexts as well. Indeed, no research project claims to be the final word on the subject, which implies that future research is always necessary, though this research project sheds light on areas in the ministry of the church that need more research, while also shutting the door on other areas that no longer require more research. Overall, this research project deduced that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in conjunction with a communal meal does build fellowship and love in a biblical way, even if not every participant enjoyed the process of arriving at this result. That being said, the implications of the research project can be laid forth.

Implications

The results presented in Chapter 4 are the bedrock on which all conclusions and implications are made in this study. The first deduction from the data is that celebrating the Lord's Supper every week with a communal meal is a lot of work. Consequently, the data shows that many participants will not think the effort to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal is worthwhile. This is particularly true of the elderly in this study, which might imply that the elderly in congregations do not desire to assume an active role in preparing for, setting up, and cleaning up something as large as a communal meal every week. This sentiment

is echoed by the results of the data, which showed a slight (6%) increase in the number of participants who desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, but showed a slight decrease (14%) in the number of participants who desire to celebrate a meal with the Lord's Supper. In terms of effort, partaking of the bread and the cup does not appear to be the issue, but rather the effort necessary to celebrate it with a communal meal.

The second implication is that the Lord's Supper is held in an ethereal, lofty light in the minds of churchgoers. This is based on the data, which showed that the participants unanimously thought the Lord's Supper to be integral to their worship at the outset, but some realized that the Lord's Supper is not integral to their worship after partaking of it weekly. One can only speculate what exactly changed in these participants' view of the Lord's Supper, but nevertheless, celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly can indeed lower the view of the Lord's Supper in the eyes of some participants. However, this implication must be balanced with the theme revealed by the data concerning the significance of the Lord's Supper. At the outset, the participants were literally split down the middle when asked whether the Lord's Supper would become less meaningful if the church celebrated it weekly. However, by the end, those who were unsure about the Lord's Supper losing its meaning changed their minds and considered the Lord's Supper meaningful even when celebrated weekly. These two statistics can be combined to make this conclusion: those who believe that the Lord's Supper will lose its meaning when celebrated weekly will experience exactly what they expected, even to the point of seeing the Lord's Supper as secondary to their worship, but for those who were on the fence regarding celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly, they realized it is not only integral to their worship, but also just as meaningful, regardless of its frequency. This study exposed the true feelings toward the Lord's Supper for the participants, either negative or positive depending on the individual.

While the second implication shows that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly might diminish the view of the Lord's Supper in the eyes of some participants, the third implication shows that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly might enhance the view of one's self in the eyes of the participants. A 17% decrease in those who feel unworthy to partake of the Lord's Supper weekly and a 12% increase in those who feel worthy demonstrates that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly increased the participants' self-image. This is interesting since each celebration of the Lord's Supper included a command to examine oneself and to remember that Jesus died for sin on the cross. Apparently, when examining themselves and remembering Jesus's sacrifice, the participants came to feel more worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper, not less. Once again, this might be an implication from the change of view toward the Lord's Supper. It was this ethereal, lofty action that was only done quarterly for the participants at Garden City Bible Fellowship before the study. This could have caused a sense of gravitas and a sense of dread of partaking unworthily for the participants. However, when partaken every week, the Lord's Supper was apparently normalized in the eyes of the participants, such that they came to see themselves as worthy participants of this ordinance.

The fourth implication, and the most pertinent one for this study, relates to the thesis statement of this entire project. The data unequivocally shows that celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal builds love and fellowship among the participants. Not a single participant disagreed that love was strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship in the conclusory survey. Those who agreed that fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship increased by 21% after participating in this intervention. In fact, the majority of participants grew closer to Jesus via this intervention, and 38% grew closer to another individual. These numbers demonstrate the success of this intervention at Garden City Bible Fellowship, especially when

broken down demographically. The data demonstrates a tangible divide between the elderly and the youthful. The data reflects this observational sentiment numerically when all the youthful disagreed that love and fellowship are strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship in the introductory survey. However, the conclusory survey results show that all the youthful, without exception, agree that love and fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship. Therefore, not only did this intervention strengthen fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship, but it also bridged the gap between the generations. These four implications come together to form a significant conclusion.

Significance

The significance of these research statistics cannot be overstated. Fellowship and love are aspects of every church, regardless of demographic, location, and background. Consequently, the results of this study are relevant to every church everywhere. The Lord's Supper does not need to be the ethereal, lofty practice it has become in many churches. Instead, it can be a regular practice enjoyed by churches weekly. Churches do not object to singing and learning every week, and as Donald Whitney observes, "Participation in the Lord's Supper allows us an experience with Christ that cannot be enjoyed in any other manner. Neither prayer, the preaching of God's Word, public or private worship, or any other means of encounter with the Lord can bring us into the presence of Jesus Christ in exactly the same way."¹ In light of the research of this project, churches are placing an unnecessary barrier to numerous benefits by not celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. Most objections disappear when the practice is implemented. Most of the participants enjoy the experience. Almost all the participants benefit

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*, (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 141.

from the experience, even if they do not agree with the practice. This is one of the most significant realities of this research: for those who do not believe that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly with a meal, almost all them benefited by participating in the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal. Clearly, there is no bias behind these results. Instead, there is only the raw data of improved fellowship and love. Unsurprisingly, the Scriptures are correct when they positively describe the early church participating in the Lord's Supper and a meal every week to build fellowship and love.

The most significant conclusion derived from this study is the simplicity of the church. There is no need for innovation or creativity when devising how to bring the church together in fellowship and love. Rather, everything any church needs to thrive is present in the Scriptures. Churches are already well aware of this fact in most areas of worship. They sing corporately weekly. They preach the Word of God weekly. They pray corporately weekly. All these practices are described as regular occurrences in the biblical church. However, there is an aspect missing in this list. Singing corporately builds the participants' adoration for God. Preaching the Word of God builds the participants' understanding of God. Praying corporately builds the participants' reliance upon God. However, none of these practices intentionally bring the attendees of the church together in fellowship and love for one another in the same way as the Lord's Supper and the love feast. Just as the Scriptures are the basis for weekly corporate singing, preaching, and corporate prayer, so too are they the basis for celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a meal, even if the practice is only implied in Scripture. All of these practices are only implied to occur weekly. As this study proved, when a church adds this practice to their weekly repertoire, a bridge is built not only between the attendees and God, but also among the attendees themselves. Again, there is no need for innovation. There is no need to be clever. The solution to this

problem at Garden City Bible Fellowship—and undoubtedly many other churches—is implicitly found in Scripture. Each church needs only to implement the practice to experience its significance. The application of this research project might appear differently in different churches, but nevertheless, a biblical solution for each church that desires to build fellowship and love is the same. Celebrate the Lord’s Supper with a meal weekly.

Applications

Indeed, the context that would benefit most from applying the results of this research project is other churches, though there is another important context that can benefit from these results. While the end goal might sound simple (celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly with a communal meal), the ways of reaching this end goal will likely vary from church to church. Some churches could instantaneously switch to celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly with a communal meal, and they would immediately enjoy the benefits. These churches are likely smaller and accustomed to change. However, for a larger church with difficult logistics, or a church that is not accustomed to change, it might be wise to apply this practice gradually. If the church is like Garden City Bible Fellowship and celebrates the Lord’s Supper quarterly, then it might be best to increase the frequency gradually. It might be better to start celebrating the Lord’s Supper monthly for a time, then biweekly, before gradually observing the Lord’s Supper with a meal weekly. Similarly, for some churches, it might be beneficial to divorce the communal meal from the Lord’s Supper temporarily. For churches where logistics for a communal meal are difficult, perhaps due to a large number of attendees, it might be easier to start by celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly but only eating a communal meal together monthly before slowly increasing the frequency of the communal meal to biweekly and, finally, weekly. The manner of reaching the end goal of celebrating the Lord’s Supper weekly with a communal

meal will essentially depend on the wisdom and discretion of the leadership of each church, particularly the elders and the deacons. They are the ones who know their congregation best and are the ones who know what will be required logistically. Therefore, it is their duty to decide how to best apply the results of this study in their church. This raises another issue of application, specifically, logistics.

In order for this study to succeed when other churches implement the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper every week with a meal, the logistics must be ready and in place from the outset. If a church fails from the outset logistically, then support for celebrating the Lord's Supper every week with a communal meal will fade fast at no fault of the Lord's Supper or the meal. Any number of logistical issues could arise. There might not be enough food. There might not be enough people to set up the tables and chairs, causing a delay and forcing the participants to wait until everything is prepared, or there might not be enough bread for the Lord's Supper, causing some attendees to not be able to participate. Any number of these complications could arise if the leadership does not take the necessary efforts to prepare for the meal and the Lord's Supper logistically. This is an understated yet crucial application. A church can never spend too much time planning the logistics of a weekly communal meal, especially if that church has a large number of attendees. Another issue of logistics pertains to time.

Each church's way of celebrating the Lord's Supper with a communal meal might appear differently. Some churches, like Garden City Bible Fellowship, prefer the communal meal to be lunch. Other churches might prefer the communal meal to be dinner. Again, the leadership should determine the time, which should not be relevant to the results as long as the practice is implemented. Another aspect of timing is the order of events. Some churches, like Garden City Bible Fellowship, prefer to eat the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper after the meal. Other

churches might prefer to distribute the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper to the church before eating the communal together. Again, this is a decision for the leadership to make, and it should not affect the results of practicing the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal. If the meal occurs after the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, then there is another aspect of logistics each church must discuss—who can participate? Every church must guard the table and not permit the unworthy to partake of the Lord's Supper, but if the Lord's Supper occurs first before everyone is dismissed, then each church must decide who can eat the communal meal as well. Again, this is a consideration for each church's leadership when applying this study. Essentially, the logistics are determined by the leadership of each church, who must plan every single detail if the application of this project is to succeed. One area in which this research project can provide guidance to future applications is in the area of food.

As discussed in the Literature Review, there are differences of opinion of how to provide food for the congregation. Some recommend providing food in a family style setting, such that the food is passed back and forth by the participants. Some recommend providing food in a cafeteria setting, where volunteers serve the food to the participants, while others recommend providing food in a buffet setting, where the participants serve themselves.² According to this project, after eating communal meals every week for five weeks, the best practice appears to be buffet style at least for smaller churches whose food is provided voluntarily by the participants. If a church caters its own food—which is not recommended due to financial strain and an inability to predict the number of participants—then cafeteria style might be the best alternative. However, for a potluck meal, the best practice is buffet style. The best practice for the source of food is also a potluck style, where each participant provides more than enough food for their

² Powers, *Church Administration Handbook*, 188.

entire family. This relieves the financial strain on the church and almost guarantees enough food for the participants. For larger churches, it is necessary for the food to either intentionally be served cold, stored in many food warmers, or kept warm in a Crockpot, assuming there are enough outlets to keep the food heated. For larger churches, this might be the hardest aspect of applying this study when having a communal meal weekly. If there is not enough storage space for food provided by the participants, it might become necessary for the church to cater the food and ask the participants to simply pay a set amount per person. Again, this decision is left in the hands of the leadership and should not negatively affect fellowship and love if there is still a weekly communal meal.

The leadership must also consider the venue for where to eat the meal. Not all churches have a building with a large enough space to eat a meal. Consequently, the leadership might need to recruit volunteers to convert the auditorium seating arrangement into a communal meal seating arrangement. The leadership of any church who applies this practice cannot leave any stone unturned. So far, the application has pertained to logistics, but there is far more involved than just logistics.

Spiritually, it is necessary for the leadership to explain the rationale behind celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal to the congregation before implementing the practice. To that end, it is recommended that the leadership preach a sermon or a series of sermons based on one or more of these texts: Acts 2:42-46, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 11:20-21. This should be unsurprising because these texts are the basis of this entire project. Any church who applies this study must emphasize the Scriptures as the foundation. Even if the logistics are perfectly planned out, if the biblical rationale is not evident to the participants, then the participants might or might not actually receive any benefits to fellowship and love. The

participants must not only know what to do, but also why they are doing it. The rationale behind celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly with a communal meal is something the leadership must make clear to the congregation, and this necessitates that the leadership be unified themselves. If some elders or deacons agree that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly, while other elders and deacons disagree, then they must arrive at a compromise. While a weekly frequency is ideal, celebrating the Lord's Supper with a weekly meal will not have the desired benefits of fellowship and love if the leadership is divided. In fact, it could have the opposite effect. Therefore, if the leadership is divided, then the frequency should be flexible and ideally gradually increased as the benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper with a meal become self-evident. Unity over the Scriptures is a more important prerequisite for church leadership than the application of this research project, because there is no fellowship without unity, and this research project's application is based on implication.

To summarize, for churches, it is first and foremost recommended that the leadership and the congregation have unity among themselves based upon the Scriptures. Assuming they are unified, it is recommended that all churches practice the Lord's Supper and a communal meal every week, although the manner of arriving at this frequency is up to the discretion of the leadership. It is recommended that the leadership take every aspect of the logistics into consideration, including: when to eat the meal during the day, in what order to observe the Lord's Supper and eat the meal, who may participate, where to store the food, how to serve the food, how to supply the food, and where to eat the food. There is freedom in the details, but the basic principle remains. It is beneficial to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly in conjunction with a communal meal, and any church that is unified in this practice will experience benefits in

the realms of fellowship and love. This is true primarily for churches, which are the exclusive benefactors of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. However, the concept of eating a communal meal together regularly for the sake of fellowship and love transcends the church.

Eating a meal together is a simple application for any group that desires to build fellowship and love. If there is a family that desires to draw closer to one another, then they should eat meals together regularly. Do families in a church desire to build fellowship and love together? They should invite one another over for meals. Again, this should not be surprising because it is a biblical concept. As previously mentioned, Acts 2:46-47 describes the ancient practice of the first church, "day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people." Of course, eating a meal together ("breaking bread in their homes") is not the only basis on which these families build fellowship and love, but it is a major factor. Families that praise God together and pray together and worship together will experience benefits, just like churches do, but adding a meal to the list solidifies the benefits. Meals are a means of building fellowship and love, and this applies anywhere, whether in a church or in a family. Regardless of the context, the benefits should still be present. Fellowship and love are built when eating communal meals regularly because they are biblical practices as verified in this study, which included many learning experiences.

Lessons

One of the primary lessons gleaned from this study pertains to logistics. Participation was not as high as was expected in any area. Fewer attendees than expected participated in the study itself by completing the introductory survey, not even half the church. Fewer participants than expected volunteered to provide food for the communal meals. Last-minute adjustments to the

meal schedules had to be made because the participants refused to cook meals for five communal meals. Instead, they agreed to cook for two meals, while one participant agreed to cook an entire meal for the church by himself. This still left two weeks without food, at which point the plan to provide pizza for the congregation was devised. Simply put, participation was much lower than expected. This reality taught important lessons. First, it taught that any pastor and/or researcher must be ready to improvise. Second, it taught that any pastor and/or researcher might need to make sacrifices such as buying pizza for an entire church to accomplish the goal. Third, it taught that while willingness to participate might be low, the results can still be worth it. Ultimately, it is an easy sacrifice to occasionally buy pizza for the entire church if that is what is necessary to build fellowship and love.

Another lesson gleaned from this intervention is the necessity for creativity. There are only so many passages in Scripture that pertain to the Lord's Supper. In fact, they can be counted on both hands. Therefore, when teaching the subject of the Lord's Supper every week, it quickly became evident that creativity was necessary. Otherwise, the topic would have become stale and accompanied by rote statements repeated every week. Consequently, different aspects of the Lord's Supper became the focus each week to keep the topic fresh for the participants. One week, the topic of self-examination was the subject of the brief preliminary lesson. Another week, the topic of unity was the subject. The last week, unsurprisingly, fellowship was the subject. This kept the topic interesting, which is important when doing anything weekly. No church would sing the same songs, preach the same sermon, or pray the same prayers every week. Therefore, it became evident that the Lord's Supper should not look exactly the same every week too. Unfortunately, one area that looked the same every week was the low number of participants, which resulted in another learning experience.

The practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper with a communal meal should succeed in any church of any size given its biblical basis. However, it quickly became apparent that each context has its strengths and weaknesses and its drawbacks and benefits. In a large church, there is a self-evident drawback. It would take many months or even years for each participant to have a meaningful amount of fellowship with all other participants. However, it became apparent that this drawback is also an unexpected benefit. Since there was only just over a dozen participants in the Lord's Supper and communal meal at Garden City Bible Fellowship each week, something interesting happened. The communal meal was usually dominated by one conversation that included every single participant. There were not multiple conversations occurring around the table, but rather everyone was included in one big conversation. This is beneficial since everyone felt included. However, it was also a drawback. There was not much opportunity for two individuals to talk about one another, something that is almost guaranteed to happen during a larger church's potluck. There are always pros and cons of being a larger church or a smaller church, but each church should be aware of these benefits and drawbacks. However, regardless of the size of the church, the benefits should be the same when celebrating the Lord's Supper with a communal meal weekly, benefits that contradict the standard objections raised against the intervention of this research project.

Fit with Previous Research

This intervention is unique compared to past research. Yes, other research projects sought to observe the benefits of partaking of the Lord's Supper every week, but they did not focus primarily on fellowship and love and the inclusion of a weekly communal meal. Therefore, the overlap between this research project's results and other research project's results is minimal. However, there is overlap between this research project and past research regarding previous

literature written on this subject. As noted before, it is a common objection that the Lord's Supper will lose its meaning observed weekly.³ This is by far the most common objection.⁴ However, this is not the first time a research project has dealt with this objection.⁵ The data provided in this study shows the opposite is true. The Lord's Supper did not lose its meaning in the eyes of the participants after they observed it weekly. While approximately the same number of people think the Lord's Supper loses its meaning in the introductory and conclusory surveys (44% and 46%, respectively), the number of people who disagreed with this objection grew by 11% (from 43% to 54%). Therefore, this objection proposed in previous literature does not stand up to the numerical data. The Lord's Supper does not lose its meaning when celebrated weekly unless the participant expects it to lose its meaning. Once again, this study demonstrates that people predisposed against this practice will likely be discouraged when participating, but those on the fence tend to see the benefits of observing the Lord's Supper weekly. This trend continues when comparing the literature with the data.

Another common objection to celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly is that the participants feel too unworthy to participate this often.⁶ Once again, the data does not support this objection. In fact, only a minority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with this objection even in the introductory survey (25%). By the conclusion of this intervention, that number had dropped to 8%. Clearly, the Lord's Supper does not cause people to feel unworthy. In fact, people felt more worthy after participating in the Lord's Supper weekly. No objection provided by the literature stands up to scrutiny and the data. Even with an increase in participants

³ Tillotson, *A Persuasive to Frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 7.

⁴ Gordon, "Why Weekly Communion?"

⁵ Jones, "Sunday Dinner with Jesus," 83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

who think the Lord's Supper and a meal are too much work to celebrate weekly, the majority (54%) did not agree with this objection. Unfortunately, the discussion in the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper was stifled by nothing but speculation and straw men.⁷ It is not too much work to do weekly, even with a meal included. It does not make the participants feel unworthy, and it does not lose its meaning as frequency increases. Rather, the research suggests the application of this biblical principle is well worth the effort. Every church should be able to benefit from this study, but other, supplementary research would be beneficial.

Future Research

In terms of future research necessary for this subject, there are many additional factors that can reveal more regarding the Lord's Supper and a communal meal and their benefits in more specialized contexts. For example, theologically, the relationship between the article and the word "bread" in Lukan theology would benefit from more research, especially in light of the presence of the article before the word "bread" in Luke 24:30 and 35. Practically, it would be beneficial for a similar research project to take place in a larger church. While the outcome should be the same—an increase in love and fellowship—there are certainly other factors present in a larger church that could be studied, such as the participants' view of the workload or exactly the extent to which fellowship and love increase. Does fellowship grow by a greater factor in a larger church since most people do not know each other, or does it grow by a greater factor in a smaller church since everyone can interact with one another? This question can only be answered by further research.

Similarly, it would be interesting to explore whether the results of this study would

⁷ Schreiner and Crawford, *The Lord's Supper*, xvii.

change at all if the intervention lasted for a longer duration. Would there still be a 20% or more increase in fellowship and love if the intervention lasted for three months? Again, there would likely still be an even greater increase in fellowship and love during a longer intervention, but it would be interesting to observe to what extent the duration affects the quantity of improvement. Moreover, while research has been conducted in the past regarding the implementation of the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper weekly and its effects, the weekly communal meal has not been implemented by itself in a research setting to this writer's knowledge. Therefore, it would be interesting to determine whether the increase in fellowship and love was primarily due to the weekly Lord's Supper or the weekly meal. For example, if an intervention observed a communal meal weekly, and if fellowship and love increased by 15% in that setting, then it could be deduced that the meal is the primary source of the 20% increase in fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship instead of the Lord's Supper. All these topics would make valuable research topics in the future to supplement the conclusions of this study.

There was a divide between the youthful and the elderly at Garden City Bible Fellowship and consequently a lack of biblical fellowship and love. With the implementation of a biblical concept, namely, celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly in the context of a communal meal, there was significant improvement in both fellowship and love at Garden City Bible Fellowship. With 20% or more increases in both areas after this intervention, it can be concluded that the Lord's Supper and the love feast are a biblical way to build fellowship and love. Since this intervention is based on Scripture, theoretically any church anywhere should be able to apply this practice and see tangible improvements in love and fellowship as well, an aspect in which every church in any country can and should grow.

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 7, 2020

Josh Peterson

IRB Exemption 4131.020720: Sharing the Lord's Supper: Building Fellowship and Love in a Sacramental, Communal Meal

Dear Josh Peterson,

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 that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

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
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

11/15/19

Garden City Bible Fellowship
3504 Bandy Rd SE
Roanoke, VA 24014

Dear attendee of Garden City Bible Fellowship:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to build true fellowship and love among the attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship in a biblical way, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete an introductory survey, attend the weekly communal meals, fellowship at these communal meals, participate in the Lord's Supper that concludes these communal meals, and complete a conclusory survey. It should take approximately 5 minutes for you to complete the introductory survey, an hour each week to participate in the communal meals and to fellowship with others, fifteen minutes each week to participate in the Lord's Supper, and five minutes to complete the conclusory survey. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, complete and return the attached introductory survey by placing the completed survey in the drop box provided.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, but you do not need to sign and return it.

Sincerely,

Josh Peterson
Pastor of Garden City Bible Fellowship

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 2/7/2020 to -- Protocol # 4131.020720

Sharing the Lord's Supper:
Building Fellowship and Love in a Sacramental, Communal Meal
Josh Peterson
Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of the Lord's Supper, its accompanying communal meal, and its effect on love and fellowship in a church. You were selected as a possible participant because you attend Garden City Bible Fellowship and are 18 years old or older. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Josh Peterson, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine if the Lord's Supper and its accompanying communal meal builds true fellowship and love among the attendees at Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an introductory survey, and return the completed survey by placing it in the drop box provided. This survey should take approximately five minutes to complete.
2. Attend as many communal meals at Garden City Bible Fellowship as possible. Each of these communal meals should last approximately one hour.
3. Fellowship with other attendees during these communal meals by having natural conversations.
4. Participate in the Lord's Supper when offered at the conclusion of these communal meals if you are comfortable with partaking. The Lord's Supper should last approximately fifteen minutes.
5. Complete a conclusory survey, and return the completed survey by placing it in the drop box provided. This survey should take approximately five minutes to complete.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants may expect to receive from taking part in this study are strengthened fellowship and love with other attendees of Garden City Bible Fellowship.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. No identifying information will be asked for in either survey. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for three years before being disposed of.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: The researcher serves as a pastor at Garden City Bible Fellowship. To limit potential conflicts, the study will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 2/7/2020 to -- Protocol # 4131.020720

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Garden City Bible Fellowship. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting either survey without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, simply do not complete and return either survey.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Josh Peterson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 248-895-1914 or jdpeterson1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Samuel Olarewaju, at saolarewaju@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX D
INTRODUCTORY SURVEY FORM

Age (circle one): <18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 65+

Gender (circle one): Male Female

Have you ever participated in the Lord's Supper weekly at any church? (circle one):

Yes No Unsure

If yes, was it an enjoyable experience? (circle one) If no, leave blank.

Yes No Unsure

Are you a member of Garden City Bible Fellowship? (circle one)

Yes No

I have enjoyed celebrating the Lord's Supper in the past (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper is integral to my worship (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it is too much work (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because I feel unworthy (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it loses it loses its meaning (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper should be celebrated with a meal (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

Fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

APPENDIX E
CONCLUSORY SURVEY FORM

Age (circle one): <18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 65+

Gender (circle one): Male Female

Have you ever participated in the Lord's Supper weekly at any church? (circle one):

Yes No Unsure

If yes, was it an enjoyable experience? (circle one) If no, leave blank.

Yes No Unsure

Are you a member of Garden City Bible Fellowship? (circle one)

Yes No

How many times have you participated in the Lord's Supper over the past month? (circle one)

1 2 3 4 5

I have enjoyed celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly (circle one).

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree

Unsure

Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper is integral to my worship (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it is too much work (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because I feel unworthy (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I prefer to not celebrate the Lord's Supper often because it loses its meaning (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

The Lord's Supper should be celebrated with a meal (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

Fellowship is strong at Garden City Bible Fellowship (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I am closer to Jesus because of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

I am closer to another person at Garden City Bible Fellowship because of celebrating the Lord's Supper weekly (circle one).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Unsure		Strongly agree

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