Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Fidelity in Institutional Structure: Divine Family Formation and the Variance of Church amid Dysfunctional Behavior

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Abstract

There has been a rift in the providential establishment of our Lord. Humanity is indulgent unto sin and the family is suffering. Disobedience and selfishness have blinded humankind into a false sense of reality. The fallacy has taken the place of divine order in the chosen avenues into humanism depicted as science, technology, philosophy, cultism, and any other route devoid of Christ. Therefore, this in-depth study seeks to dispel or to bring to light a revelation of where humanity rests in the grand scheme of contemporary life. Two notions of preponderance present themselves, to forgo selfishness and to embrace righteousness. Can moral and ethical reasoning be found to garner humanity’s attention from wickedness (2 Chr 7:14)? Can faith, surrender, and trust become an intentional condition unto humility (Prov 3:5-6)? A benefit in the establishment by Christ is the church (Prov 27:17).

What are key practices local churches can engage in to help families be strengthened in faith to overcome dysfunctional behaviors? The crux of this research endeavors to discover how faithfulness in home life, via devotions, can be experienced. It will particularly consider how participation in small group practices can affect this. The promotion of health will allow for cohesive bonding, a means to address detailed concerns and to draw closer within the community. These practical means prove to be supported through divine inspiration. Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer for humanity’s embattlement with sin as he is the way unto salvation (John 14:6).
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Dysfunctional behavior has run amuck and plagued humankind since the Garden of Eden epoch. The fall of humanity, due to disobedience, has ushered in sin and chaos to be the lament of human existence. The law was given to society to show the infinite need for Lord God to be the Lord of all human lives. Living devoid of Christ is a recipe for disaster (Matt 7:13, NKJV). Therefore, humanity is amid spiritual warfare between the forces of good and that of evil. Humankind is in no position to make, bend, or even set rules. Humankind must follow one of the two masters (Luke 16:13). In this endeavor, Christ explains the situation quite simply, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt 12:30). Moreover, without Christ, humanity is doomed to nothingness (John 15:5).

The first institution the Lord God initiated was that of the family when he adjoined Adam and Eve as husband and wife. Eve, being created from Adam’s rib forms connectivity of oneness between the two (Genesis 2:23). Contemporarily, the husband and wife are drawn to one another as two to become one flesh (Matt 19:5). Hence, the focal point of Satan’s attack on humanity has been the family. If the mind of each family member could be hindered and swayed, then the structure of the family will falter without the inclusion of Christlikeness (Phil 2:5). A benefit of health within the family lies in the confines of family devotion. This operation infuses a healthy dynamic to focus on God’s will and his healing process. Otherwise, an offering of avenues for dysfunction may seep in and become the causality of familial decay.

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: TN, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982).
These newly found actions of dysfunction among the family members have become pleasurable and worldly acceptable, in the sense of becoming commonplace in today’s society. Sexual immorality, cultism, frivolity, envy, murder, oppression, and idolatry are but a few encumbrances that sin has blossomed into in the lives of humankind. There has been a blinded shield and a deafening buffer placed within the realm of man to augment the communication between Lord God and his prized creation. Satan has hurried the pace in rapidity to the point that many have turned from God to other ways of belief altogether (2 Tim 4:3).

There is a duo-effect of fidelity amid the family structure. Faithfulness to God was the familial-themed crux of humanity, which enhanced the same notion from one family member to another. However, the inclusion of confusion and chaos has caused an implosion within the morbid structural integrity of the family. Faithfulness in Lord God must be rekindled and highly accentuated. The family benefits exponentially by committing itself to family devotions to bring recognition and awareness to the Lord’s presence and strengthen levels of faith as a result. Lord God is faithful unto humankind and requires the same relationally; thus, his diligence directly or indirectly interfaces with people. He wants to be amid all daily operations of life that he brings guidance, direction, and clarity (Prov 3:4-6). There must be an inward willingness that enables his divine intervention. What can garner a return to God? How can wickedness be dropped and surrendered? How can the healing of the Lord flow and bring back a real sense of reconciliation within the family? Can the church offer a reprieve? In the scripture of 2 Chr7:14, Lord God gives a way to reform, “if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

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Nelson shares her take on dysfunctional behavior and the downfall of the family. She states, “Sin is traditionally understood as the human response of unfaith that is made when the anxiety of this slippery slope teases/tempts one into securing oneself in some other way than by trusting in God and appropriately trusting oneself and others.” According to Nelson, this dysfunctional behavior becomes a “school for sin.” The design of this study will bring the hidden factual elements to light. These elements could become the causality of dysfunctional behavior within the family through exposure amid family devotions and how structural fidelity within the church small group endeavor becomes a benchmark to bring resolve. The purposeful inclusion of these small groups within the church can directly address societal issues and individual challenges. The study will address families in their operation to deal with dysfunctional behavior and how they, through family devotions and in participation in church small groups can become healthier. A stable platform is a prime source that produces health and prosperity in Christ. The basis of structural foundation operates in the will of God which supports a ministry context.

Ministry Context

The focal point of the study will be on the familial integrity and structure as each member relates and operates with one another. Utilizing the faithfulness in the Lord, these sets of operations to be played out are paramount. Faithfulness spawns a myriad of fruitfulness in spiritual maturation. Forgiveness, hope, joy, peace, long-suffering, patience, divine reliance, surrender, kindness, and understanding are but few enhancements grown from a life in Christ through faith in God (Gal 5:22-23). Moreover, the greatest of these is love – God is Love (1 John

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4:8). Now, at the inclusion of sin, from an indwelling of being born into sin and shaped by iniquity, humanity finds itself inept and dysfunctional without Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior (John 15:5).

Therefore in weakness, humanity is made in strength through Christ. Lord God is immutable and unchanged, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forevermore” (Heb 13:5). Hence, humanity is in continual need of him who is right and eternal in every facet of life. In the turmoil of humankind, with indwelling sin and the sin-nature, 2 Tim 2:13, offers much solace and hope. It states, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” Submission into the goodness that is Christ warrants the love of God to usher in change for his good. Only in and by the atonement of the blood of the Lamb can actual change occur (2 Cor 5:17). Pipes and Lee shares the view of the family as a model of Christianity, as Henry Drummond stated, “The family circle is a supreme conductor of Christianity.”5 They go on to add, “Clearly, God intended the family to be the most basic social unit of society… to carry the message of God’s love.”6

The family structure is to emulate the real relationships the Lord God has established in heavenly places. Notice how he creates man into his image and places him at the head of the family. Each child is related by being brothers or sisters just as in the church with Christ at the head. Faith in God serves as the lifeblood of communication that each member has the peace of Christ (Phil 4:7) and the love of the Father to offer stern chastisement when warranted (Rev 3:10). Deut 8:5 lends support to that aforementioned, “You should know in your heart that as a

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man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.” Therefore, devout faith in the Most High supersedes the multitudes of the evil one to tempt you into sinfulness. Jas 1:12-16 gives the recipe for the birth of sin and how it leads to death.

What exactly is faith? Faith, according to Heb 11:1, is the assured belief in something unseen that comes to fruition by hope. Without faith, it is impossible to please the Father, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, those who come to know that He is (Heb 11:6). How does one foster faith and strengthen himself in kind? Family devotions, prayer, hymns, Bible studies, and a thorough thirst to be led by his Spirit yields a benefit of healthiness. A focused remembrance to slow down and rest (Matt 11:28-29) by taking leave in one another, energizes one to strive for greater zeal in Christ. Only the Father builds dynamic trust through experiences in him, study in his word, and through the trials of struggle and triumphs of his deliverance. The ministry context of praise and worship through personalized experiences enhances the faith of the believer and carries the non-believer toward conversion. The relationship the Lord God had with Israel was synonymous with that of a marriage. A healthy and nurturing marriage is the foundation of the family. Webb states, “But as the Lord then took her to be His bride, entering into a covenant with her at Mt. Sinai, so he would take her again and renew his relationship with her. He would not cease to be her husband and Redeemer. The Sinai Covenant would stand.” Hence, by and through spiritual experiences, faith is thereby increased as the Lord fulfills his promises. At the confluence of change in Isaiah Chapter 11, we see the fall of the human kingdom nation of Assyria and rise from the ashes in the land of Judah. Webb concurs as he states, “Assyria is felled never to grow again, Judah is felled only to have new life

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emerge from its stump." The significance of this is the essence of faith and dependence on the Father (Matt 22:32). Isaiah, the prophet, rightly boasts of the Father, “Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins and faithfulness the belt of His waist” (Isa 11:5).

Faithfulness is paramount and overly imperative in the fashioning of spiritual maturation. The Lord is no respect of character; what he has done for one he is apt to do for another (Luke 1:37). He is faithful to recognize, mend, and heal familial bonds into the robust linkages of his love. Lord God, in the divine processes of his great sanctification, utilizes the initiation of relationship. This invitation must be made aware of from within. The Lord operates from the inside as the believer showcases Christ outside (Jer 17:9-10). Focusing on the process of divine change into newness, Issler contends that timing is essential, “These cases, along with other New Testament passages, teach us that our formation is a process that occurs over time.”

Relish the journey that is his salvation and rejoice in the hope of Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). Surrender in praise and worship increases belief and strengthens faith levels. The Lord will fight your battles and come to your rescue (Rom 10:9). Can the church become a caveat or a bridge of support to bring those who have strayed back into the loving arms of the Father (Luke 22:32)? Can the rift of faithlessness within the familial structure be mended into the newness of life (2 Cor 5:17)? These are but a few topics of issue that plague humanity, the church, and the purposeful communication from God. A thorough endeavor of an in-depth query will address the problem.

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9Webb, 74.

Institution of Family

Within the scope of his desires and his will, Lord God established institutions. In these, humankind could adhere to and govern themselves through sacrifice and surrender. However, faithfulness unto the Father as Lord and God of all our lives must be paramount. Three such institutions that are to provide parameters and order in the operations of humankind are government (1 Cor 14:40 and Luke 20:25); family (Gen 2:24 and Ps 127:3); and the church (Eph 2:20-22 and Heb 10:24-25). This study will focus on the institution of the family and its formation through divine intervention. Faithfulness to God is overtly apparent and even so among his creation. Therefore, faith can be heightened through family devotions and the church’s small group enterprise.

Marriage itself can stand alone as an institution as its merit is weighted heavily by fidelity and trust between a man and woman. However, marriage becomes the focal point of the family structure with the inclusion of family members. Children, in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins, and grandchildren are but a few additions that could cause the family to swell quickly over the years. The more members that the family incurs begets the clash of individual personalities with those outside the family to bring into the fold. The conglomeration of attitudes, beliefs, characteristics, individualism, and selfishness could become a time bomb ready to blow. A healthy and robust marriage submitted to the will of God and a sublime and faith-filled lifestyle surrendered to his Holy Spirit can only be the pursuit that drives the family toward godliness. The model by which humanity is to pattern itself is in Christ Jesus; therefore, by his character within, godly behavior becomes the zeal for the Christian\textsuperscript{11} (Mic 6:8).

\textsuperscript{11} Paul Pettit, \textit{Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ} (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 144-145.
A degree of pragmatism has set in among contemporary families. A more cavalier (word by word) and (take it as comes) in Scripture to grasp a commonality of daily living is becoming the mainstay of belief as opposed to dependence on the Lord. The family devotionals today are viewed through the lens of tradition and not that of purpose or obedience by remembrance (Luke 22:19). However, it is through remembrance that fulfillment can be reached toward progress.

Upton declares that today the concern of believers is defocused on irrelevancy rather than what is at stake, she states, “The first Christians focused instead on what happened to the people who shared bread and wine in memory of Christ. We have two thousand years of stories about people whose lives have been transformed by their experiences around the Christian family table.”

The institution of the family is vital according to divine order. The church reflects a familial connection by referring to members as brothers and sisters. Scripture depicts the church as a bride and Christ as the bridegroom (Matt 25:10). Spiritual formation of the family is a process by which the Father ushers change by faith. Pettit shares, “One glorious day all those who have placed their trust in Christ (justification) will enter into God’s presence (glorification) and enjoy a long-awaited pilgrim’s rest. But until that day, each of us who places faith in Jesus Christ and is living out the life of faith here on earth is being transformed (sanctification) into the image and likeness of our Savior.”

The church can serve as the central hub to answer deep-rooted concerns and to aid in unraveling God’s detailed will through small groups.

**Interpretation of the Church**

The conceptualization of the church came into being at the coming of the Holy Spirit as he rushed in like a mighty wind of fire cleansing change (Acts 2:1–4). Why is this considered to

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be the outset of the church setting, as a means of teaching and promoting Jesus Christ? The rush of the Holy Spirit’s presence was due to the way the Spirit came unto the believers as they received inspiration; therefore, they fed the people in their tongues. Then, Peter preached one of the most powerful sermons ever recorded as 3,000 souls converted to Christ (Acts 2:41). Likewise, the church is the Lord’s house of prayer (Mark 11:17) and commonality of fellowship where believers can come together as iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17).

As one comes into the realm of adulthood and the strong influences of peers, parents, siblings, and the world, there may be a tendency to go it alone without the inclusion of the Lord. Pathways become more evident as the individual finds pleasure in the self and success within the constructs of sinfulness. The Lord has a purpose to send persons into the lifestyle to redirect and aid in the molding process. Faith in God and willingness by allowance are imperative. The Lord, in his ways and thoughts (Isa 55:8-9), could allow crisis, trauma, or grief to intervene to get one to open their eyes truly. He chastises those whom he loves. Jer 29:11 gives hope and aspiration unto his children as preponderance begins to seep in, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Richards and O’Brien share their take as they concur, “The message is clear: you are striking out on your own, but don’t worry; God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

The revelation of unfolding, the process of sanctification, should be better understood, applied, and operated within the structure of the church.

A healthy church is a place of growth, maturation, and progression in the Spirit of transformation as a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). The individual is the church of Christ, and the building carrying the name is a fellowship of believers gathered in togetherness.

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Moreover, the issue of problem occurs when the elements of the worldview come into focus within the church. Methodology outside the Christian view brings confusion and conformity into the realm of faith and belief that could cause friction within those who may be weak. In this, those who are more durable and able to see with Spiritual vision are more readily able to aid those who do not (Rom 15:1). Tenelshof, a proponent of the church and the processes of prosperity within, illustrates eloquently the intent and purpose of the church, “This concept of family denotes that when we come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, we are weak and needy like when we came into this world helpless and in need of others. Weakness is where Christian spiritual formation begins and never leaves. Awareness of one’s limitations in comparison to God’s limitlessness needs to be cultivated in the family of God, his church.”

The correlation between family and church is synonymous. There is awareness in the descriptions of the operation of the Father and how the church’s perception is received. Having faith in God and an understanding of our weaknesses through the realization of humanity as the Father’s possession (1 Cor 6:19-20) allows for better growth, trust, and dependence on Christ. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations hinder an individual’s development and heighten disbelief. How does one surmise and come to the point of disagreement or misconception? Systems of families permeate from a basis of tradition, customs, tales, and the like. These points of origin may derive from the gossip of those who know of the Holy Spirit. The danger lies when one does not seek out and or commit unto the Lord holistically under the auspice of surrender. This commitment can be rendered only through letting go and let God have his way within, “Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established” (Proverbs 16:3). Duval and Hayes bring to light a myriad of

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encumbrances that hinder the learning and acceptance of some. They also offer ways to circumvent as such to convey significances of meaning. They state, “We are separated from the biblical audience by culture and customs, language, situation, and a vast expanse of time. These differences form a barrier – a river that separates us from the text and that often prohibits us from grasping the meaning of the text for ourselves.”\(^1^6\)

Head knowledge alone is not sufficient because it takes from the Father’s glory. The increase in the understanding of the Father comes through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Through development in willingness, openness, and trust to surrender, an ability ensues to let down all guards, and let the Lord have his way to operate within his possession (1 Cor 6:19-20). The role of the Holy Spirit is not totally within the learned aspects of digesting the Scriptures but more so within the acceptance of truth and discernment of spiritual activity. Growth lies in the applications of acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.\(^1^7\) There must come a fundamental point in spiritual maturation where one encounters the Spirit of God to emboldening unto Christ. Identity brims in the acknowledgment of who God is and to whom one belongs. These divine principles in mindsets that mark for the overall realization of what, better yet, the church is being fine-tuned. The church is not brick and mortar comprised of a cemented foundation with a shingled or metallic roof, the church is flesh and bone, the very believer and staunch follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus says this of himself as he says he will raise the temple in three days, “Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (John 2:19-20). As it is currently known, Christ was referring to himself, not


\(^{17}\) Ibid, 227-228.
the structured physical integrity of the stone temple. Being the first fruits of many to follow, Christ became humanity’s perfection, of example.

Hence, from the very people who lived while Christ was on earth, even his disciples, no one truly understood him nor his intent at salvation for humanity. Kaiser and Silva make their claim as they concur that the totality of knowledge in the Father is within the Spirit. They state, “Almost from the very beginning it can be said that many listeners and readers of the message of the Bible were slow to apprehend the spiritual truth it contained.”  

Small groups within the church setting can be designed to address concerns and to educate those who thirst for spiritual knowledge. The establishment of small groups has been intact within the confines of the church for centuries, however, its utilization can be set to aid in faith formation. It was by the inspirational inclusion of the Holy Spirit that brought enlightenment and understanding only to those of a broken heart and contriteness of spirit. Sin ravages and plagues humankind. At the acceptance of its temptation, it seeps into fortified walls and causes decay and a temporal reversal. Sin, therefore, can be categorized into behaviors of dysfunctional proportions.

**Dysfunctional Behavior**

How does one categorize and define dysfunction? If functionality was proper during the creation of things set forth by the Father (Gen 1:12), how then was it changed to be wrong? The first sinful act of humankind was disobedience at the eating of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Lord God forbade Adam to partake. The first mention of sin was

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made by God in his conversation with Cain regarding his brother Abel, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen 4:7). God says that sin desires to destroy and impart death, but he also says that humanity should rule over it. It can only be done in his Son and not of ourselves (John 16:33). This tainted functionality is somewhat accepted as truth and good out of ignorance and deception. The Holy Spirit offers discernment and vision that one may be able to steer clear.

Sin is real and multi-faceted, hidden as a rouse in disguise. What exactly is sin? What is its functionality? In their explanation of the doctrine of sin, Clinton and Hawkins describe enmity against God, “…sin is any lack of conformity to the law of God in the act, disposition, or state. Rather, sin in its biblical and theological setting describes behaviors, motives, and a state of alienation from God.” Based on its most rudimentary state, dysfunctional behavior has its origin embedded in sinfulness with the intent to disrupt. This induction of sin caused alienation from God, between humankind, and the peace that existed in nature among flora and fauna. Sin, therefore, buries itself deep within the psyche of the mind to disturb and bring about psychosis and varying disorders to bring chaos and confusion among the family members and society-at-large. Not only does sin tear apart families, but it also plants the seed for generational patterns of behavior. The American Psychological Association reports that “a child’s witnessing the abuse afflicted by one parent upon the other, even if the child is not physically abused, can be among the strongest risk factors for transmitting violent behavior from generation to another. It must be kept in mind that domestic violence is a form of learned behavior.”

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21 Ibid, 42.
rightness in the eyes of humanity pales compared to that of the authentic righteous one. There is
the dire need of the Savior in the trueness of abidance (John 15:7).

Dysfunctional behavior in the family setting is not predicated toward one discipline but is
gulfed into a myriad of facets that can be learned and spread without recognizable knowledge.
Even within the church setting, research has shown that parents drive to induce such behavior
through perfectionism. Parents are pushing and trying to instill a Christlikeness into their
children to be perfect. However, this cannot be since Christ is the only perfect one who lived
without sin, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the
righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). Craddock, Church, Harrison, and Sands allude to
this phenomenon, “Recent studies using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale have
shown general dysfunctional perfectionism to be correlated with high levels of parental
psychological control . . . . Parental control is part of a wider set of family variables associated
with dysfunctional family systems.”23 Some misconceptions indicate that within the structural
integrity of the church lies beliefs contrary to what scripture teaches. The redirection unto
misinterpretation and misunderstanding has misconstrued the thinking of congregants from that
of Christlikeness (Phil 2:5) to some other way. Without Christ, all pathways are dangerous.

Only in Christ will there be found relief unto the whirlwinds that is sin. Humanity must
be able to overcome the strongholds of the evil one through Jesus. John 16:33 gives assurance of
hope, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will
have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Christ, amid the healthy


23Alan E. Craddock, Wendy Church, Fleur Harrison, and Alexandra Sands, “Family Origin of Qualities as
Predictors of Religious Dysfunctional Perfectionism,” Journal of Psychology & Theology 38, no.3 (2010): 206,
church, under the auspice of his Holy Spirit, offers change for his better. This study brings together a plethora of avenues to pursue divine resolve. Focusing on how dysfunctional activity has impinged upon the institution of the family, this study will look to the church and the construction of faith as a means to combat and safeguard oneself in spiritual family formation (Eph 6:10-11).

Statement of the Problem

The root of dysfunctional behavior is the unbalanced order that sin shrouds. The press of sin is to trap and to overtake innocence in kind to do its bidding. Sin is the pre-cursor to evil itself as it lies hidden, masking as good to deceive and operate in the openness of human activity (2 Cor 11:14-15). This activity belies spiritual warfare into a sense of irrational human behavior in subtle expectations. Lord God first spoke of sin as he warned Cain of his anger toward his brother Abel, “So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen 4:6-7). The last sentence of verse 7 shows doom and hope. The desire for sin is a control that leads to death (Jas 1:14-16). Moreover, the overcoming of sin lies in the abidance of Christ (John 16:33).

Hamartiology, the study of sin, depicts and breaks down its nuances that all lead to the blatant act of hostility with Lord God. Enns gives a definition of original sin and the mandates it incurs, “Original sin may be defined as the sinful state and condition in which men are born. . . . Sin is the transgression of the law of God. Sin is a failure to conform to the standard of God. Sin is a principle within man. Sin is a rebellion against God. Sin is wrongful acts toward God and
These actions of atrocities lend to the behavior of abnormality within the providential structure of the Father’s intent for humanity. The ways of living that produce an aura of health, progression, and prosperity resultant from divine purpose through faith and obedience become interrupted. The Lord’s prized creation is finite and inept to battle without Christ (John 15:5).

In the teachings of Paul, as he relates the Gospel of Christ, he reaffirms the prophets of old in the Old Testament and ties in the structure of the family as he brings to light the majesty of the Lord’s will. The role of the family is paramount in the kingdom of God and family devotions help to keep them grounded and rooted in Christ. Gangel grasps the conceptualizations of Paul as he utilizes the modeling of the family, “The family concept exceeds specificity of member roles in relation to each other and builds in the New Testament a whole new vocabulary, a whole new way of talking about God and man based on family analogies.”

The problem lies within the family member and his or her acceptance of worldly desires that embody selfishness. Selfish ways cause a deterioration of faith that ultimately transforms into faithlessness (1 John 2:16). Dependence on God becomes lost. Skepticism in God leads to the same among those nearby. An eruption of dysfunctional behavior explodes to impede the progression of health within the family relationship. Can the church restore faith? The small group endeavor is enabled to pinpoint detailed encumbrances that may exist and lie dormant with momentary flare-ups. Donahue and Gowler share their take on the prevalence of the small group facet, they state, “While the recent growth of the small group movement in America has been

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phenomenal, the usage of small groups for spiritual growth has existed throughout church history.”

Drawing closer to God enables him to draw closer to you as your faith builds, and your belief becomes strengthened (Jas 4:8). An effort is a resultant of his initiative to relate through Christ Jesus. McGrath’s experience was an epiphany of awakening, “It’s like an oasis in a desert, equipping us to work and serve in the world while fostering and safeguarding our distinctiveness as Christians. I began to realize that the church was imperfect yet important in anticipation of heaven, whose worship and ethos were integral to my faith. The church was a community gathered around the public reading of God's Word, its interpretation and application through preaching, and its enactment in worship and prayer.”

Therefore, the church has a purpose if and only if surrender and obedience to God becomes a personal focal point. The solution is given to the problem of the issue if sacrifice becomes the centrality of faith. According to the research model, in ascertaining a greater understanding, the unforeseen could accentuate or hinder the study. Expectations are necessary to absorb assumptions and to accept inevitability. How can the church meet the needs and incorporate faithfulness to those who suffer relationally? The problem is that there seems to be a miss for some to gain a more practical perspective in a personal application, regarding the spiritual benefit by advancement in the Lord. This awareness of practicality in family devotions and the small group initiative can grow individuals during times of struggle. A realization of hope gives way to an unspeakable and indwelling joy of the resolve to come.

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Definitions, Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

How can one come to a measurable construct to draw a populace that best fits the control and experimental groups? When the presentation of a problem or question formulates in such a way that suggests inclusion, then the process of alignment by association begins to take place within the thought process. Relatability and connectivity are the anchors of personal empowerment that the participants can grasp. Contributors to the study become the study and develop an attitude of want, as the curiosity of possibility ensues.

Moreover, the best persons to research are the ones with the most interaction within the confines of the study environment.\textsuperscript{28} Swinton and Mowat suggest an atmosphere of the relationship as they explain, “Participatory research recognizes the importance of the starting position of the research enterprise and seeks to ensure that the perspective of the research subject inconsistently held in constructive tension with that of the researcher and the research process.”\textsuperscript{29}

Definitions are imperative in the conveyance of understanding and significance. The defined explanation will defuse notions of misconceptions and misunderstandings that could cause a lack of interest resulting in withdrawal. The provision of a glossary of terms can aid in the study model process to ensure comprehension and ignite a higher interest. It will also be a means to support and enhance the flow of the study. The direction of the research will undertake the underlying premise of fidelity within household devotions established among family members and how, if any, the small group endeavor within the church holds variance. The utilization of delimitation settings of control and experimental grouping will ensure smooth

\textsuperscript{28} John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research}, 2nd ed. (London, UK: SCM Press, 2016), 211.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
transitions. The aim is the interaction with those in the church currently in an active role, whether it involves entitlement, parishioner, committee member/administration, clergy, or layperson. These individuals will serve as the control group and will have representation from each genre that makes up the enterprise of the church setting in the operational sense. The experimental group will comprise those individuals who are believers in Christ, have membership in the church, and accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. These are persons who have uncommitted themselves from the stance of the church setting as proposed by Christ, distancing themselves from the fellowship. They will also be those who have not committed to another church but still hold to ultimate salvation. Has familial faith become wavered being away from the church setting? Can a reintroduction through the small group jumpstart the process of healing (Zech 1:3)?

The forms of measurement and instrumentation for usage are the interview and the questionnaire/survey. These will allow for measurable levels, the experience of dysfunctional behavior, closeness among family members, and the inclusion of the church setting. The setting will not include the church itself but a centrally located facility to which all are familiar that reside in the city. The facility has smaller rooms to ensure confidentiality, spatial accommodations to conduct specialized survey material, and detailed grouping for focus on specific dysfunctional behavior. These forms of usage are the necessary methods to ensure timeliness, efficiency, and a means to gauge the overall course of the study. Decorum and respect are highly valuable, as Paul writes in 1 Cor 14:40, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

Limitations are the unpredictable occurrences that may arise that could alter or slow the study. Illness, family or personal emergency, weather, fear, or withdrawal is characteristic of unforeseen limitations of participants that can halt, alter, and impede the study. However, other
factors fall under the auspice of constraints that may be the causality to preclude the review. Such factors may include lack of accessibility (information, resources, and mentorship), debilitation in time management, and lack of support. As such, these focal points will bring about nuances that may slow or alter the study. Even the validity and reliability hinging upon the honesty and integrity of participants may be at stake.  

Accessing information in lateral movement may be hindered based upon church leadership. The ways data are gathered and or through a means of direct participant refusal or even withdrawal could pose a concern. Resources serve as a limitation due to budgetary determinants that could disrupt the latitude of flow for achievement. Lack of available assistance could be detrimental and delay the process. Time management deficiencies challenge the holistic scope of the study, but also individually, about the participants and their willingness to divulge themselves in kind. Honestly and integrity by study contributors are key components for overall benefit. Lessened organizational and participatory support may be a setback of monumental proportions, in that, it would impose time constraints and enforce frustration of delays. Assumptions are the preconceived processes not yet occurred but expected. Therefore, these said assumptions can benefit time management or lead to a waste of time. The research perspective will and must be engaging enough to be personable and for inclusion to be met. Participants must see and feel themselves within the basic structure to feel belonging.

Thesis Statement

Lord God is intentional and purpose-driven for his glory to be made known and for him to be loved. As love (1 John 4:8), Lord God has a specialized blessing for his elect and those

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who love him (Rom 8:28-29). Since the chasm by rift employed in the blatant act of disobedience through Adam, humanity has been aimlessly moving away from God onto other ways that lead to death (Jas 1:14-16). Lord God himself became our salvation and remedy, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Salvation through justification, at the obedient act of Christ, even to the cross, is the love that is the Gospel of Christ. His sacrifice made atonement available for whosoever chooses to trust and take him as Savior and Lord. He provided reconciliation back to the Father (1 Cor 6:20). Moreover, sin is real and progressive, and nor death is not defeated. Therefore, the process of sanctification by Lord God is required as we die daily to temptation, lusts, and personal desires (1 Cor 15:31). Coping with life demands and living uprightly in faithfulness must become the pinnacle of existing as humanity. Healthy assurance can be realized through the small group experience if arranged by churches for families to participate in, this can diminish or preclude dysfunction in the home. This research will seek to demonstrate this.
Chapter 2
Conceptual Framework

There are unseen forces at work beyond the scope of human cognition, which influence the daily operations of humanity. The effects of good mean to bring enlightenment, prosperity, and increase at the faith level of a belief that exudes obedience (John 10:10b). Moreover, there are the forces of evil that are at direct enmity with that of good with intentions to deceive, destroy, and devour any semblance of the diligence of right (John 10:10a). These forces are amid warfare with one another with the delicateness of frailty caught in the middle. Humanity must come to know their dependence on a good, loving, and merciful God who is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and the very essence of love (1 John 4:8). Therefore, Lord God being so immensely irreproachable, immutable, and possessing in exhaustive power, the evil one then turns to the vulnerability of the Lord’s prized creation, humanity. As Satan utilizes cunning deception and lies to sway understanding to indulge in sin and turn from goodness, he aims to gain momentum to rule over his minions to combat Lord God (Luke 22:31). Simultaneously, Lord God initiates a rapport of relational love of himself through his Holy Spirit to be unionized in the true abidance of his Son Lord Jesus. This union is sanctified by the atonement of his precious blood (John 15:7). His gift is the invitation unto salvation at the Gospel of Christ (John 3:16-17).

There is prime importance at the institution of the family structure and its formation unto divine intervention. A positive point of maturity the family experiences through Christ becomes aware during the diligence of understanding by willingness. The Spirit infuses the bonds that tie the family in cohesiveness. The process must be made in exponential increase and development,
lest it falters and become stagnated.\textsuperscript{31} The same concept exists between the individual (church) coming into the knowledge and presence of Christ Jesus. Pettit shares his view by stating, “Jesus calls all who would follow him to take up their cross. That is, Jesus asks each of us to die to our own individualistic and privatized dreams, desires, and life plans and humbly and sensitively follow him into new avenues of relationship and service in the Christian kingdom. He asks us to allow him to form us and shape us into his own desired ends.”\textsuperscript{32}

During all this development and construction lie sin and the temptation it offers unto evil practices. The orchestrator of this endeavor is Satan, as Christ describes in John 8:44. Enns says this regarding sin and its ever-fluidic meandering of destruction, “. . . the sinful state and condition in which men are born (1) derived by Adam; (2) present from the time of birth; and (3) is the inward defilement of human life. Simply stated, it refers to ‘the corruption of our whole nature.’”\textsuperscript{33} Sin is the ammunition of Satan to spring his attack onto humankind. He operates within the constructs of the family to unhinge what goodness has established. He utilizes hidden agendas and personalized modes of selfishness within the family members playing against the other until disruption spills into brokenness. These patterns of behavior are dysfunctional and become the causality of familial decay.

These acts can become so prevalent and weighty until forgiveness wanes or ultimately becomes forgotten, prayer abandoned, churchgoing and participation dissipate, and a more blatant scene of self-reliance and meaningless in methodology accepted. These disillusioned acts become an indulgence in wickedness and the stronghold of vice is cemented by the evil one.

\textsuperscript{31} Pettit, \textit{Spiritual Formation}, 24.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Enns, \textit{Handbook of Theology}, 324.
habit seems to be unbreakable. The remedy to all our ills is Lord God himself. He has overcome in victory (1 John 4:4). The healing process involves repentance, recovery, atonement, and dedication (2 Chr 7:13-16). Then and only then can one become a champion in the Gospel of Christ to win souls and elevate our Lord. Wheeler and Whaley indicate that believers must be aware of their faith and be comfortable sharing it with others. They state, “Christians should (after all) enjoy their faith, but it remains to be seen whether this same boldness is transferred to daily living out one’s faith with unbelievers as fishers of men (Matt 14:19).”

The firm belief by faith enables Lord God to act, per his will, to remedy the issues of a situation. The question rests with those who are in dire need. Can willingness be activated for change to occur? Can the callused heart be allowed to be reconstructed into a heart of flesh? Ezek 36:26 says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Humanity is under attack as spiritual warfare wages. The integrity of the family is breached, with the male at the center of primary concern. If consensus can be reached, among believers and non-believers, in this regard, then willingness can be garnered. Dysfunctional behavior needs to be met head-on through the confession that it exists. Then, through counseling techniques, treatments, or developmental scenario training, along with the doctrine of scripture, resolve can be acknowledged and accepted. The practice of family devotions can enrich faith levels and thwart senselessness to engage in purposeful divine communication. Levels of understanding may be at risk; however,

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finding simplified methods of illustration should be used to contextualize literature to contemporary means.  

The transference of information regarding dysfunctional behavior needs to be talked about and embraced as an actual occurrence. The formation of awareness could benefit families among generational lines, so when the nuances start to develop, they can be dealt with and neutralized early. Looking to the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2) for comfort, security, and growth also, but more importantly for sustainment, must be at the forefront of familial development across generational lines. Ma shares research findings of such within the structure of a family, “While the quantitative analyses reveal the probability of religious transmission despite times of rapid change, the qualitative data provides ample information about family dynamics across generations. Those vivid stories delineate some typical routes families traversed and shed some light regarding religious transmission.”

There must be a focus of concern among these series of issues housed within dysfunctional behavior. The purposed intent of this study is to conduct efforts to expose hidden subtleties and to awaken those oblivious to these attacks. The church can be a help in a myriad of ways by the establishment of a trust in Christ Jesus through small groups and to welcome change. The church is an offering of extension to aid in a time of dire need.

Furthermore, small groups within the church could be employed to fuel growth, build


faithful understanding, and reach others unchurched.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, as sin causes dysfunction within the family, by faith in God through his will in Jesus Christ and immersion in home devotions, the church and small group endeavor can circumvent dysfunctional behavior.

\textbf{Review of Precedent Literature}


Christ, being the focal point of the church and the children of God, the Christian leader must pour out Christ’s influence on those he leads. A healthy church reflects leadership, which mirrors Christlikeness (Phil 2:5). Therefore, in submission unto His will, He, in turn, will lead, teach, and instruct through His vessel, the Christian leader.


The prophet Isaiah depicts many aspects of the Messiah’s life, death, and deity long before Christ walked the earth. This book shows the relational issues the believer must endure to live unto Christ victoriously (John 16:33).


The book of Luke depicts Christ as the perfect man, and this commentary brings to light the significance of Jesus’ purpose on earth. It clearly illustrates how His purpose expresses contemporary living.


To have Christ at the forefront of life, one must experience him directly. This book shows Christ as the Son of God and how by rapport, humanity must model itself. The family can become consistent models as imitators that he enriches life (1 Cor 11:1).


The menace of dysfunctional behavior can lead to a plethora of disorders and abnormalities. This book looks in detail by definition at the various occurrences that disrupt the family. It takes a practical approach to counsel technique with Christian intent (Phil 4:7).


This work gives an in-depth study of Jesus’ deity and how He glorified the Father in everything. The life of Christ is a life of obedience and faith. Prudence is resultant by emulation.


The article looks toward extremes of religiosity by perfection in living unto God by humanity, living according to the law. This premise does not consider the sublime order of faith, dependence, and trust in God to sustain and provide. Matt 4:4 states, “But He answered and said, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”


Domestic violence is real within contemporary society. It is the very disturbance that is employed to disrupt and deter belief. Can the relief be found to augment such behavior? Jesus is the answer to all ills of humanity (John 14:6).

This book features an application of scripture as a component that enhances learning and acceptance. Teaching and sermonizing do not always reach parishioners; other avenues can be useful also.


To be in Christian leadership is a place where the task is daunting and a grand challenge. There is importance in self-care, leading to peace and equilibrium. During struggles, abiding in Christ gives peace and calm.


This book illustrates the process of a growing faith and how to preclude spiritual stagnation. Therefore, the majesty of our Lord is a continuous process of maturation in Him. Faithfulness is a divine imperative.


Humanity suffers in the wake of crises, trauma, grief, and loss. The book offers pathways onto the road of healing and coping with such atrocities. The use of scripture sets the tone for dependence upon the Father (Ps 46).


The article takes the necessary foundation of the family, which is the marriage and gives credence to the union of two becoming one (Eph 5:31) through faith and dependence on God.
This belief in godliness matriculates down into the rest of the family as blood does within the body.


This article looks at how the family structure of a top-down theory integrates levels of faith and the operations thereunto toward the children. It also a reflective aspect as the children’s confidence is viewed by the parents (2 Cor 5:7).


The scope of the Gospel, a defense thereunto, may be needed to show, tell, and relate the Gospel of Christ. This book accentuates faith as the prime factor in a life of godliness by introducing (1 Pet 3:15).


This work gives an insightful devotional look at the New Testament Scriptures. It helps in understanding the Holy Spirit’s power for the church’s growth.


This work focuses on the purposeful benefit of connecting how the enterprise of the church can provide the proper one into wellness. The pursuit of peace and the construction of brotherly love is the crux article (Rom 14:19).

This work explains a Christian’s identity in Christ. This work determines the relativity of Christian identity in Christ’s likeness. Is there a reflection of the very characteristics of Christ?

The aim is to find this reflection.


There are times when the Christian and the secular are blurred. This work clarifies how the two are different in serving the Lord.


Faith in God is a must to please him. It is the crux of the whole matter about his will and our dependence on him. Father Abraham is a prime role model who exemplified the true essence of faith. Faith is what is needed to implement the healing process within any state of brokenness.


To emulate the very nature and characteristics of Christ is a perfect place to start when building character. The (Rock of Ages) is foundational and the only source of real character. Through willingness and surrender, one can learn Christ’s nature (John 15:4).


To know and be known is one of the great opportunities for believers in Christ. Through exalting Him in all things, the church experiences and grows in expressing His life and love.


Unity in the church gives power and inspiration to share the gospel with others wanting and needing this same grace. The Center Church allows theological vision to be the drive in the mission to make disciple-making disciples of Christ.
Too many times, Scripture gets misused due to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Tradition and customs are usually the culprits. This book shows how to delve past these layers and find thoroughness of fact. Knowing the what and how often answers the why.


A relational rapport in Christ means that one must know Christ for himself. This piece infuses John’s depiction of Christ as the Son of God in the perfection of his deity. The Spirit of truth reveals the mystery of the Father, which alleviates misunderstanding.


This piece is a look into the history of Christian formation. It shows the development of thought by production and by inspiration in how the church came into being (Phil 2:5).


This work shows the intent of teaching and cultivating the foundation of learned religion toward offspring within the family. Deuteronomy 6 emphasizes such practicality within the very structure of family so that Lord God remains knowledgeable.


To be led by the Holy Spirit, one must envision the course set before him or her. This re-visioning of your future comes by aligning everything to the Father’s will. Lord God is the cause of His transformation for the betterment of the church.

Without faith, it is impossible to please the Lord (Hebrews 11:6). Hence, with faithfulness in submission to the will of God, the church can operate in the strength of God to be healthy and prosperous. Becoming target-focused provides direction, especially as Jesus being the focal point.


Humanity’s consideration of healthy church growth does not always coincide with the Lord’s assessment. Lord God is the barometer to monitor development, not per numerical membership or by weekly attendance. He is the orchestrator of spiritual maturation. He gives mercy where and to whom He deems fit (Isa 63:7).


The article looks at the timing and state of the contemporary local church, with reliance placed on faith and not sight, looking to Jesus as our eternal hope. By His authority as Creator, Jesus’ impeccable timing is just and exact. It is the believer’s privilege to serve.


Dysfunctional behavior is not natural in the order of godliness. It could be so within the world due to the indwelling of the sin-nature. This piece looks at the workings and diligence of sin as it infiltrates the family. As a result of dysfunctional behavior, sin lies at the door (Gen 4:7).


How does leadership look? How does one become a leader? Change has to take part in the very life of the leader and those who follow. It is the immutable One that brings about change.

This piece illustrates the commonalities and contrasts of the Bible related to other works of ancient times. It shows the historicity and spirituality of belief and written accounts of specified events, people, and places of the past.


This piece looks at the facets of risk management and issues that may arise to prevent and protect those affected by the misconduct. A healthy church must safeguard against the wiles of the evil one (Eph 6:11).


Christian leadership involves bringing people together to know unity with Christ and one another. Foundational principles and elements of the Holy Spirit are vital components to the transformation process in becoming Christlike.


The enjoyable experience of bliss and belonging felt when born again is familiar. This work looks at the revelation of faith in the new birth experience (2 Cor 5:17).


This book takes an in-depth look at the family and how interdependence in faith leads to cohesiveness in togetherness. The importance of spending quality time and rest are also vital points. The Bible is central to the development of health within the structure of the family and its well-being. The hope of Christ is essential (Heb 12:2).
Rice, Brittany E. "Humility in Worship Leaders: The Importance of a Commitment to Spiritual Growth and God-Centered Leadership." PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016.

This work looks at the character of humility, as observed concerning God-centeredness and how formation develops. The health of the church must rest in Christ for the favor of the Father’s witnessed expression.


This study reveals leadership traits that help a congregation to model Christ. Making Christ Lord brings great rewards individually and corporately.


The Word of God is prophetic, as is the very lives of humanity through existence. Therefore, the same acts humankind relents thereunto is known by the Father. This book brings to light the embrace by acknowledging our past born to focus on the present.


The emotional quotient plays an essential role in the interaction of individuals and how they respond to one another. Valuing God’s work makes one more effective externally. Emotional health weighs heavy in the wealth of spiritual formation.


The establishment of vision requires sacrifice and surrender to God. This book shows the relational aspects of a personal journey in Christ. In the indwelling of his rapport, a pre-requisite of the healthy family becomes evident and attuned to Christ.

The worldview looks at how to succeed through the outcome-driven lens, while spiritual attainment bases itself on an inner character. Selfish ways of thought could hinder progress and sever relationships. A rethinking is in order when the avenue places its foundation in Jesus Christ. He is the supreme leader.


The Lord God is sovereign as he reigns supreme. Therefore he utilizes the church to form as believers come together in the Spirit as iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17).


Walton, John H. *Genesis*. Vol. 1 in *The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text...to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. This commentary takes into account the leadership work from a Godly perspective. It lends to traits of character that exude trust, faith, surrender, and joy in the Father. (Rom 2:11)

Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. The essence of human growth in learning was first through traditions and customs based on storytelling and myth. At the initiation of knowledge in Lord God, all else became vanity as truth was revealed (Prov 3:5-6). This book shows how such ways of thought derive over time. Traces as such, contemporarily, still linger.
Dysfunctional behavior affects every aspect of society. The family is under much pressure when a member succumbs to such a significant deficiency. There is a dire need for resolve in these endeavors (Phil 4:19).


Written to the Jews, the Book of Matthew bridges the Old Testament into the richness of grace revealed in the New Testament. Matthew tells his Jewish audience that Christ is the hope of salvation. In knowing Him and making Him known, the church is built healthy and grows from a Godly perspective.


Dysfunction befalls the marriage arena sometimes in conjunction with the family as a whole. It permeates the state of fragility among all facets of the family. This book looks at the factuality of hope in every aspect of practicality. It infuses the Biblical principle and establishes core values as a praxis to augment the past to embrace things anew (2 Cor 5:17).

**Theological Foundation**

Within the Father’s process of sanctification during the molding, shaping, and fashioning by a divine change in the believer, one comes to a precise knowledge of Christ. Faith levels strengthen as belief and support become fortified in the presence of our Savior. The church becomes the place of fellowship and gathering among believers who may be at differing levels of maturity. All balances out as those stronger in faith help and aid those who may still be babes in the ministry. Rom 15:1 shares this sentiment by stating, “We then who are strong ought
to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” The value of the strength in Lord God is all the more evident through dependence during the acknowledgment of our weaknesses (2 Cor 12:10). The small group endeavor within the church structure offers intimacy and bonding for those who may need nurturing and better understanding. Kirkpatrick shares his emphasis on the community through small groups within the church; he states, “Christian community can make your church come alive! A genuine sense of community is contagious. For when we in the body of Christ share ourselves in small groups, the Spirit works through us to create an inviting, attractive quality of life.”

Moreover, being made anew in Christ does not mean that you are physically reformed but spiritually remade as a new creature (2 Cor 5:17). Piper chimes in by looking at this mystery in more laymen's terms, “The new birth is not like the make-up that morticians use to try to make corpses look more like they are alive. The new birth is the creation of spiritual life, not the imitation of life.” There has been a significant misconception that when one ushered unto this newness, they are devoid of sin. No, this misconception is not true. Sin still lingers within this realm and has not yet been eradicated. Therefore, sin forces its way in by temptation, and through our ultimate weakness, it finds a chink in the armor (Eph 6:11). As consideration of this temptation wanes and contemplation gives way to imagination, then the body follows, leading toward downfall (Jas 1:14-16). Lord God hates the sin but loves the sinner, so much that he sent his only begotten Son to save humanity from condemnation (John 3:16-17).

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40 John Piper, Finally Alive: What Happens We are Born Again (Minneapolis, MN: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 35.
In Mark 9:24, the father of the child believes but still notices that he has a degree of wavering. Authentic faith cannot be earned or mustered up through good deeds. It is the fruit of the Spirit; it bestows from heavenly places. At times, some have doubts, and this is the human element outside the structure of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling (1 Cor 6:19). Believers must come to the knowledge of specialty by identification to whom it is they belong (Eph 2:10). The father of the dying child knew Christ was able to heal his son but was still skeptical, “Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Contemporarily, the question remains what or who is this power of greatness? Jesus knew of his ability but wanted the father of the child to have full faith that he could do it. The father learned of his imperfections and fragility. In the presence of the Messiah, he had to confess that he required a touch to be made whole in his faith walk.⁴¹

As life meanders along its mundane trek, humankind must seek out the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33 & Isa 55:6) that he provides new life and not a restoration of the old. Lord God will provide direction and clarity within the enlightened pathway set before the believer (Ps 119:105). Trouble will come to our doorstep; therefore, humanity must concede unto Christ and allow him to bear our burdens (Ps 55:22). A deeper understanding is achievable in a close-knit arena. Small groups build enrichment, value, and care among participants.⁴²Even in the means of practicality, Lord God will be glorified. Christ is the hope for salvation and the foundation of life in godliness. Hope is paramount. Worthington states, “Hope involves a motivation to endure when we cannot change circumstances. . . . God is the author of hope. He is the source of all power,


⁴²Kirkpatrick, Small Groups in the Church, 21.
including the power to make and hold together a good marriage."\(^{43}\) The improvement and growth in faith start with the teaching of what hope is. Knowledge of how the implementation derives denotes maturity.

**The Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4–9**

The condition of teaching is one of the six operational functions of the church and is purposeful in every avenue of ministry. Moreover, education is established within the family and has been since its inception. The parental guides of the family and the sage elder thereunto are charged to keep the knowledge of God afloat within the familial construct. Sin causes a major rift within the relational union of God and humankind. Evil and sin are constant and vigilant to no end. Lord God often placed reminders among his people to keep them mindful of him and his goodness of sustainability (Num 15:38-41). Family devotions such as reflective art trigger enlightenment and a more thorough comprehension of the Lord’s diligence regarding humanity.\(^{44}\) Godliness and the ever-press of knowledge in Christ must meet the same expectation of ceaselessness to become what the Father intends of those who love him (1 Thess 5:17).

Sin has caused families to drift further apart regarding the teachings in the will of God. Only 12 percent of America’s families pray together.\(^{45}\) Lord God established the institution of the family to be the flagship unto a dismal society in the desire of faith and service to one another.\(^{46}\) A devout commitment unto surrender must be made from the head to trickle down throughout each member. There must come a time in life when the decision made to relenting


\(^{44}\) Daaleman, “Modern Family,” 96.


\(^{46}\) Ibid, 9.
and submitting oneself unto the Lord in the realization that personal life belongs to God\textsuperscript{47} (1 Cor 6:20). There is an essence in the teaching shown in the Shema Jewish prayer that states that God must be obeyed at all times and not forgotten. Deut 6:4-9 states, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Lest the believer forgets to whom they serve, teaching encourages commitment, builds faith, and assures identification in Christ Jesus; these are the hallmarks of family devotion.

Alignment by Faith in God

McIntosh shares the view of Lord God as the life-giving God of love as he sets the stage for his glory to be given back unto himself, “The life-giving nature of God is demonstrated in the acts of creation. God first established an environment to sustain life. The crowning achievement of God’s work came on the sixth day. God’s personal involvement in the forming of humankind was even more intimate.”\textsuperscript{48} These acts are the characteristics that exemplify love, compassion, and excellent detail of care. Such features need to be taught within the family as faith grows and brims with anticipation of hope. Purposeful teaching looks at where love derives from and the essence of its point of origin (1 John 4:8). Nothing shows more enjoyment from the Father than

\textsuperscript{47}John Ortberg, \textit{The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God’s Best Version of You} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 60.

the wanting of humankind’s salvation from death and sin. Small groups within the church can look at these points and bring to light the intent the Lord has for his people: repentance. Meaning, a return unto God from a severance due to sin in dysfunctional behavior brings restoration, rejuvenation, and a compelling toward health. Repentance means a revitalization of rebirth for the family which triggers change, creates humility, and brings awareness to divine dependence. No matter the dysfunction, Lord God can mend the brokenness experienced and for the family to utilize the setback as a springboard to aid others in their journey. Family devotions and the small group endeavor are vital interventions to reintroduce a healthy connotation.

As 2 Pet 3:9 reveals, the faithfulness Lord God has toward humanity in longsuffering, according to his promise, he is merciful that change unto him will be the remedy for the ills of this world. Families benefit through a willingness to embrace the small group experience in the church. This newly found environment evokes change and emergence for betterment. Spiritually, families attain a vision to accept and embrace the establishment of the newness of health. Redemption offers life eternal in the heavens (Matt 19:29). At the fulfilling of prophecy in Isa 53, Lord God gave unto humanity the vicarious sufferer to bear the brunt of his wrath that pardon may persist to those who believe in him (John 14:6).

Jesus is the doorway unto salvation as he has shed his innocent blood for the ransom of many to flourish into salvation. Therefore, he must be cherished, loved, and adored. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Indeed, this is a love that honors God for the teaching of family members throughout all generations. Gangel looks at the gift of freedom of choice among humanity
regarding salvation, “Every human being has a choice—eternal life or eternal death. And as the Bible describes it, to perish is not to cease existence, but to experience utter failure, futility, and loss—an eternity without God.”

Teaching brings out the elements of love and the recognition of the Lord’s perfection as it pertains to his grace, his mercy, and the countenance of his presence. The truth of this authenticity cannot be experienced among humanity because humankind is finite; however, within the auspice of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, these elements are felt and observed firsthand. Active faith increases as you operate in the abidance of Christ and becomes the product of family devotion. His change of what he intends of you becomes you (Heb 11:1 & 6). For the novice, not yet committed to the livelihood in Christ Jesus, how can one surmise a working understanding of practicality when it comes to dysfunction in behavior and the disruption of normality?

Theoretical Foundation

Knowledgeable firsthand endeavors usually enhance understanding things as they occur based on past experiences. A sharing of global research could persist with explanations to defend and critique said occurrences. King Solomon says in Eccl 1:9, “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.” Hence, some trace of recorded history exists to surmise an explanation to a degree of consensus in understanding. The human element is not full proof, it is a fallen faction into sinfulness.

A theoretical explanation of a situation is a definition by academic discipline with its basis to view an event in a particular way. Hence, based on reason and viewpoint, one presents a

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problem or difficulty as being accepted as logical and measurable in understanding. Such ideology is not necessarily accepted as factual or truthful but simply an alternative to a way of thought and reason. In family intervention through operational norms, one deals with the repercussions of forgiveness, acceptability, and mechanisms of coping skills.

Time is the best coping mechanism for understanding and finding a sense of empathic compassion when trying to deal with the dysfunctional behavior of a loved one. How do their actions affect each member directly? Is there a sense of belonging within dysfunctional behavior itself? How does one heal and move on in a conducive and healthy manner? There are many avenues to take to offset the dysfunctional behavior. Counseling could involve multiple sets of individuals where all can come together and achieve closure by dealing with specific issues. Taking part in a set small group of individuals with similar dysfunction can be therapeutic and helpful for the one in need. The small group setting enables him or her to open up and admit to the problem. Beck contends that therapy is discrestional when dealing with issues of religiosity. He states, “If psychotherapy will be enhanced by addressing religious themes involved in a client’s distress, (Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy) REBT therapists are encouraged to incorporate those themes and issues into the psychotherapy even if the therapists do personally share those religious convictions. . . . As clients then replace false beliefs with beliefs that are more in keeping with the teachings of their own religion, clients will improve and will function better emotionally and behaviorally.”50 These practices are necessary to get the family to the point of communication among one another. Therefore, this also opens the door to a willingness of acceptability in faith as the means of healing.

Psychodynamics

The theory of psychodynamics is the belief of external forces that impinge upon the normality of human behavior to the point of noticeable change. These eternal forces become the causality in the acceptance of abnormality through the alteration of expression. These are a conglomeration of psychology and personality theories to find commonality and pinpoint issues of concern. In the case of dysfunctional behavior in the family, the forces of peer pressure in an advertisement would be dynamic in teen smoking, even non-smokers in the household. The approach pinpoints the teen’s personality relating to the family.

For the pastoral counselor, psychodynamics can explain the dynamics of the divine as a privileged intrusion of betterment. Prayer, being in tune with the Holy Spirit, the family can experience the best of both the practicality in therapy and also a supernatural experience in the Spirit. Thornton expresses himself as such, “When one knows that he/she is praying in the Spirit, or more accurately, that the Spirit is praying in him/her, certitude follows. The Holy Spirit lacks nothing as an intercessor between the human and the divine.” Spiritual intervention is a real and inspirational dynamic to behold.

Co-relational Hope-Focused Discipline

This concept looks at the tendencies of relational cases experienced in similar fields of dysfunctional behavior. Therefore, research must commence culminating a relatable audience to which to assume a comparison. As the pool of evidence come to relate to the case by which is being observed, then the inclusion of Everett Worthington’s hope-focused counseling techniques

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can be employed. As the counselees buy into the notion of the therapy and view the
dysfunctional activities as implements of spiritual warfare, then the auspice of hope and the
scenario training of faith-based exercises can be infused to garner a way of thinking that is
dependent on a higher power greater than all. Scripture tells us, “For if our heart condemns us,
God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (1 John 3:20).

People tend to grasp the practicalities of the explanation of life even when they seem
attuned to spiritual attentiveness. Understanding especially holds valid to the babe in Christ, the
unbeliever, and those unchurched. The research in the history of the dysfunctional behavior and
the family member had bound unto it directly and indirectly among other members. Worthington
shows that there is a method in history, “History taking also gives clients hope and increases
their motivation to change.” Familiarity, in turn, drives a change in the core vision and
reluctance to regression when the introduction of betterment and resolve shows availability. The
building of hope lends to trust that enhances faith among familial ties. It’s when these ties
become strained and weakened or even severed that forgiveness and trust begin to fade.
Forgiveness exudes the same characteristics of Christ to which increases reconciliation through
trust. Forgiveness is not a learned and attainable condition, but through surrender, it comes by
the Spirit. These factors strengthen through a healthy venue of like-minded (Phil 2:5) individuals
within the church setting. There must be an actual and effective means to ascertain detailed
information to measure, compare, and gauge progress along the lines of strengthening faith to
enhance the healing process. These sets of the process materialize in the next chapter.

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Chapter 3
Methodology

Placing concentration on the institution of the family and how Lord God purposes the formation thereof, a discovery of dysfunctional behavior has revealed itself. Dysfunction is not to any acknowledgment of weakness in divine prowess but does convey significant encumbrance in the operation of humanity devoid of Christ (John 15:5). It is in the flirtatious intervening of welcomed sinfulness that humankind finds itself in situations of the plight that warrants immediate attention. A perpetual immersing in prayer, teachings, study, and a continual placement in Christ must endure by an application of family devotions and small groups, because of the relentlessness of evil and how it wants to hinder life in godliness (1 Thess 5:16-18).

In this arena of spiritual warfare, Lord God intends for the believer to have a dichotomous relationship. He or she must have an intimate, personalized rapport with him and be corporately involved with like-minded individuals in Christ. By these set standards of this method, the believer can praise God within him or herself and, therefore, likewise with others. Thus, the set stage becomes ready for the believer in inviting and embracing the lost, wavered, the non-believer, and those engulfed in ignorance through the small group endeavor. As the diligence of the Lord progresses within family devotions, Satan sees also and seeks to find ways to thwart what the Lord establishes.

Indwelling faith must be exercised and honed as iron sharpening iron among those believers in a setting of togetherness and fellowship. The health of this gathering only enhances and further increases the concepts of faith and trust in God. Satan means to bring a halt to increase and a rise in placing belief in the self. He wants to destroy a loving relationship in the Lord and accentuate a love for selfishness through self-acclaim. A lover of and in self brings
about a slow and gradual decline in the fellowshipping of togetherness. In Swinton and Mowat’s chapter of researching ministry, in their book, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, they add the following:

In line with much of Western Europe, there is a significant decrease in adherence to traditional, formal institutional religion. The decreasing number of people regularly attending places of worship evidences this. However, while traditional religion appears to be on the decline, there is a corresponding increase in the number of people expressing the importance of spirituality. People now want to believe in things spiritual, but no longer wish to belong to traditional religious institutions.55

The church in itself is not the crux of salvation, but the avenue to advance the people of God to a life enriched in his Son. The small group effort can be used in a way for the Lord to be glorified and his people edified to be used unto his specified desire. The spiritual leader must be called of God with a vision of the divine and a purpose to lead the people of God along his mission to serve, lift Christ, and exalt the Father. Christianity is expansive and inclusive to all with a widespread belief that Jesus is Lord of all, and any other way is not.56 Jesus Christ only and always (John 14:6). Sin is the cause of attack; others outside the faith see a decline in the persons within the religion. If those in the church embrace the world standard, those outside the church see no reason to be involved (John 17:11).

Research Design: Data Collection

This study will look at a measure of faith based on detailed questioning (survey) and interviewing individuals to answer unto preciseness regarding faith, family structure, family devotion, small groups, and a personalized relationship in Christ Jesus. These parameters, in the participation of church operation, a determination will be derived to see if the church has any

55Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 149-150.

variance to dysfunctional behavior with faith as the foundation. The control group will consist of believers who participate in the church operation as departmental workers (laity) or clergy. The experimental group will consist of believers who do not attend nor participate in the process of the church arena. A broad range of perspectives will be considered, such as age (from age 14), gender, ethnicity, education, socio-economic status, denomination, or non-denomination.

Recruitment efforts will be in the form of face-to-face interaction, bulletin advertisements within points of specified interest in the community, and the dissemination of flyers. The aim of gathering data is to deduce a correlation or a disparity and ascertain a design of explanation based on the demographics presented. Starcher, Dzubinski, and Sanchez detail the nuances of typical research designs most often used, “There are two basic social science research paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research findings, as the name implies, are expressed in numbers (e.g., 93% of people reading this article find it incredibly exciting). Qualitative research findings expressed uses descriptive language (i.e., words). Quantitative researchers in missiological circles often use surveys to gather data gathered both from and on people.”

There is great importance in gathering and disseminating data collected to enlighten validity or uncover a glaring unknown. Statistical measuring in the quantitative genre gives rise to more actual tangibility. The utilization of percentages, charts, graphs, and applying a weighted determinant to scale and plot the more abstract of viewpoints serves to add depth. Faith, in the practical sense, cannot be measured in the preciseness of a flawless degree. However, dependence will hinge upon the participant’s willingness of honesty and knowledge of faithfulness. Therefore, to quantify an explanation of measurement, one would utilize numeric

expression. Swinton and Mowat deem qualitative design as the expression that uses wording to describe, explain, and marginalize set parameters of particular collected data. They further elucidate on the matter, “Qualitative research involves the utilization of a variety of methods and approaches which enables the researcher to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit it.”

A method is a precise technique used in an analysis to determine outcomes in data collection. A particular methodology is the study of the said method per se. These points serve as the foundational make-up in the data collection portion to give credence and validity to the data collected. The way the data is used, presented, supported, shared, and stored is imperative to the research. Findings may shed detailed insight on how people view church purpose and its role community-wide. Views tend to be spread along the lines of vital and healthy or as an eyesore. Contemporarily, spirituality seems to be the more direct route in ascertaining a working knowledge and an agreeable consensus in salvation. Can this be true? Does Christian instability regarding the church cause a hindrance within the community?

There seems to be a movement that does not involve the church setting in the more traditional sense but unto ways of similarity in like-mindedness and individual harmony devoid of the corporate environment (2 Tim 4:3-4). Gerhardt finds that in these times, people are settling and not in the reliance of faith amid fellowship, “Autobiographically illustrated, those identified as church-leavers - referred to by some as 'churchless faith' - do not reject faith nor do they necessarily return later to church attendance as if only in transition, but rather they represent stories of a new resurrected faith identity and, as in the case of the author, a deeper liberated


59 Ibid, 69
liberalism. . . Churchless faith is a new ecclesia for many of the emerging generation.”⁶⁰ These are the types of findings of the outcome this study hopes to unearth.

Lord God is a relational Supreme Spirit that is the essence of love (1 John 4:8) personified in the likeness of His Son (John 10:30). Since Jesus Christ established the church through his apostles for the growth, improvement, and construction of his Father’s kingdom, why then is there a decline within the realm of believers? It is the blatant inclusion of worldliness that shuns and offends staunch believers within the church. Focusing on Christ through the church is imperative for the health of the church to be restored. Love is relational and intuitively giving into the noble act of forgiveness.⁶¹

Setting and Purpose

Divulging such intricate detail of personal information in the formation of the family as it pertains to the nuances of faith, salvation, and a personalized relationship with a risen Savior, some may find it challenging to be and remain open during the study. The proverbial walls of personal security may hinder the flow of continuity to progress and be honestly committed to the research. Coursing faith and devotion unto the Father could waver and become stained unto the weak by the ravages of sin in familial dysfunction. A more personalized venue went through a process of pre-determination to be out of the scope of the public. The office space rented in the name of the primary researcher gives way to comfort, security, freedom, convenience, the familiarity of locale, and confidentiality. It offers a kitchenette for hors d’oeuvres, multiple men’s and women’s restrooms, a boardroom and auditorium, an office, and a lounging area with television. If the intent is to spend a specified time for the gathering of personal data, then

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⁶¹ Issler, Living into the Life of Jesus, 91.
comfort and reliability were crucial determinants when choosing a suitable locale.

A distinct degree of hermeneutics will come into play regarding how the perception of interpretation employed becomes itself throughout the study. These degrees of understanding are essential in the findings and the way they are measured. According to Sensing, there will be variance based on personal interpretation as he states, “Hermeneutic theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, praxis, or a situational context, whether one is reporting on one’s own findings or reporting the perspectives of people being studied.”62 Amid expected outcomes of participants for the study, expectation yields that the recruitment efforts will draw no less than a total of twenty-four. The design calls for at least twenty persons involved within the questionnaire/survey component, while a detailed and more specified number of four individuals selected for the interviewing section. Determination met, and feasibility assures that this would be a workable and attainable pool to operate within.

For committal by those contemplating participation, the study, in the form of a raised key issue, had to be relatable, publicly and personally experienced, and outcome-based to address the problem. If a person is currently involved in dysfunctional behavior or is close to someone in their immediate circle with similar strains, then a detail of concern will be met. In some venues, spirituality may be universal to some degree, to which dependence is placed into something more significant and thought to be more able to handle the stressors of this mundane life. Some may have had an encounter around the church setting, positively or negatively. Due to that experience, it caused unrest or even strengthened faith that has augmented belief. Explanation of phenomena within the myriad of occurrences can find hidden results. Findings dealt with on

many fronts, become resultant by acceptance, which will ultimately come back to belief or disbelief. This study accentuates faith in God through family devotions and the small group endeavor that he is real and can overcome any obstacle of problematic sin that we carry unto Him (Ps 55:22). “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

The journey and process of life are such that a personal discovery by a relationship can be achieved through trials by fire to see the vividness of the Father’s majesty. No one exacts change but the One who changes not (Mal 3:6). Ortberg shows the Lord’s process of sanctification, as he states, “Life is not about any particular achievement of experience. The most important task of your life is not what you do, but who you become. God made you to flourish – the received life from outside yourself, creating vitality within yourself, and producing blessing beyond yourself.” Hence, there must be a willingness to be used by the Lord, a belief that he is God, and a commitment within the framework of faith, trust, and dependence that all will be well according to his desire (Isa 25:8). Theologically, hope, with emphasis placed squarely on faith, spiritual family formation through home devotions, and the acknowledgment of Christ’s passion in the church small group arena, produces an awareness through acceptance unto Jesus that honors the Father. There is a detailed distinction within the temporal life of the flesh that derives from the soul, in conjunction with the newness of life reborn in Christ Jesus, where Holy Spiritual presence reigns.

Can a level of understanding and accepting the will of God be rooted in education and achieved knowledge? To what degree does the ascertaining and placement of socio-economic

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64 Piper, *Finally Alive*, 36.
status have on faith level? Jesus states, “God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Therefore, according to Scripture, faith is bestowed upon humanity through the auspice of the Holy Spirit and cannot be achieved through practical means (Gal 5:22). Socio-economic status, education, and obtained knowledge are all applications warranted among humanity to gain a better understanding of the things temporal. God gives an increase. He fashions his chosen into the image and likeness of his Son (1 Cor 3:7). Coming to a revelation of the Holy Spirit in the process of the Lord’s sanctification, there is such provision in the vibrancy of comprehension that ultimately comes from above (Jas 1:17). There is overlying hope that as a result of this study, a rekindling of faith in God will be the crux of a new and revised relationship unto his will. In the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit lies a zeal of determination that compels the believer to be humble and submissive; Klein, Bloomberg, and Hubbard elaborate this rebirth through interpretation:

In short, the five crucial elements for proper interpretation and application are: (1) spiritual rebirth, (2) spiritual maturity, (3) diligent study, (4) common sense and logic, and (5) humble dependence on the Spirit for discernment. Roy Zuck’s list also reminds us that the Holy Spirit never intended that we read the Bible solely in isolation from all other believers. Read the Word, study it, meditate on it, and then apply it. God will bless you as you do!  

Therefore, a release of self and temporal logic must find abandonment to give way unto the will of righteousness that precludes fleshly desire, a sinful nature, and lustful temptations (1 John 2:16-17). This research intends to indirectly accentuate the inclusion of faith to be administered within the scope of the family in devotions. Lord God is cultivating uniformed trust to divinely form and shape the family into the likeness of Christ. Faith must be the foundational platform

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through family devotions to combat, address, and face sin in dysfunctional behavior within the family.

Dysfunction in the Family Setting

Normality, in the secular sense, is the set agreed-upon facets that make up the acts that dictate and illustrate compliance regarding the established laws, regulations, and corrections. As these facets become violated and harm comes to the innocent, then enforcement of said laws is needed to ascertain motive, intent, and justice. Theologically, the Lord is true, just as he is sovereign (Num 23:19). Therefore, as Creator, he commands obedience and adherence to his laws under the auspice of his Holy Spirit. In Christ, humanity enabled by the Spirit overcomes sin. In his conversation with Cain before the atrocious act of killing his brother Abel, the Lord converses with Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen 4:7). Hence, as sin runs rampant within the operation of humanity, humanity will do well to submit to the will of God in the transformation in Christ Jesus (Isa 64:8). What is sin? What is its intent for humankind?

Sin is the direct force of causality that places humanity at enmity with the Lord God. As it tempts and allures his creation to a sense of fallacy by deception, it is ultimately humanity’s decision to indulge and commit to its ways. The overall antagonist, the evil one, utilizes sin to coerce, entice, and tempt ignorance. The shallow-minded on the cusp of conversion could easily submit to redirection to an alternative other than Jesus Christ. Any way devoid of Christ brings about a sentence of death (Jas 1:12-16). The worldview does not agree with theological acclaim in godliness. The worldview looks at humanity as being able to live life according to what seems right, what feels pleasurable, and what is morally and ethically acceptable (1 John 2:16-17). The
dysfunctional act of disobedience committed by Adam earmarked the ushering of sin into the realm of man. Enns stakes a point of validity. He states, “If Adam was not a real creature who brought sin into the human race at one point in history, then there is no point in Jesus’ redeeming humanity at another point in history.”

The Lord sends his Son into the world for the sake of salvation that humanity might find and accept salvation. Lord God has no designs for any to perish but have everlasting life (2 Pet 3:9). It is up to humanity to believe and possess the faithfulness of the Lord that he is God. Belief can better be attained in the humility of selflessness and not through the lens of worldly selfishness. Hence, at establishing his church via his Holy Spirit, Christ builds champions for kingdom building. Satan employs sin to be the buffer to infiltrate the church and to confuse believers from fellowshipping in togetherness. Noll concurs as he shares his dismal and poignant historical take on the church, he states, “Even more than humility, a study of the Christian past can also engender profound gratitude. Despite a dazzling array of God-honoring triumphs and despite a wide and deep record of godliness among believers of high estate and low, the sad fact is that the church’s history is often a sordid, disgusting tale.”

Contemporarily, with so many distractions and viewpoints of thought, many are swayed to enter the wide gate and bypass the entrance that is straight, narrow, and less traveled (Matt 7:13-14). Why would family members look to the church for aid in dysfunctional behavior? Can the corporate enterprise of the church interface with the personalized experience of faithfulness? The church has a myriad of worldly concerns that have come into its confines from sexual immorality, adultery, embezzlement, fornication, false teaching, harlotry, and etcetera. Satan has

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66 Enns, Handbook of Theology, 321.

informed his minions to excel in church operations and to act relationally only to reveal deception at specified times. Salvation is in Christ and not the church. A personal belief in Christ must experience a change from within the indwelling Spirit. Exposure will come from the Holy Spirit, and he will separate those loyal from those bent on destruction (Matt 25:32).

A healthy family is also at risk (Rom 3:23). It must be inclusive of surrender, faithfulness, and dependence on Christ, and knowledge of resolve in the Lord (Ps 55:22). A newness of reform unto Christendom is in song and expressed in openness by a tribute to the goodness and grace of our Lord.⁶⁸ In this contemporary age, the dynamics of the family are sparse, diverse, and at times, convoluted. The formation of the family intends to possess the minute ingredients of a healthy society that were to be obedient to God in reverence and love for one another. The dynamic of the family through devotions bring togetherness not only among the family per se but unto those families raised in health throughout the years.⁶⁹ The family is to be structured in the Father’s purpose in spending quality and intimate time with one another.⁷⁰ This endeavor shows the love for those outside the family as brothers and sisters in Christ. This evangelistic quality wins others to Christ and promotes growth in the Church. No matter the plight of your situation, Jesus is Lord and able to bring resolve for you (1 Tim 4:2). When times are right on the mountain-top or even not so good amid the valley lows, Lord Jesus must be related thereunto to keep believers affixed in the will of his Father.⁷¹

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⁶⁹ Upton, “At the Family Table,” 165.

⁷⁰ Pipes and Lee, Family to Family, 11.

⁷¹ Ibid, 114.
The subtly of change that sin offers may be untraceable to the temporal eye; however, nothing is unattainable for the Spirit to deduce. Remaining in the will of the Lord and being immovable in his Son will enable the believer to endure the hardships the world has in causing hindrance (1 Cor 15:58). Baroody sheds relatable light on the forty-two generations of Christ, in that; perfection was not the common thread in the Messiah’s lineage. Baroody states:

The generations of Jesus are jam-packed with highly flawed characters, not the least of which are Jacob the con and David the murderer. Even wise old Solomon let his many foreign wives turn his heart to other gods. Don’t forget Tamar who posed as a prostitute to trick Judah, her father-in-law, into impregnating her with twins. Then there is Rahab, a certified prostitute. And finally Mary, the over-bearing mother, demanded that Jesus turn water into wine. It’s comforting to know that God's blessings, even the blessing of the Messiah, come to us through flawed families, including families who spend way too much time talking to the dead.72

Lord God can take any endeavored situation and make it into what He pleases. He is omnipotent and sovereign. His course reigns no matter the committed pathway ill-regards to humanity’s feebleness by logic.

The Enterprise of the Church

Dangerously evident within contemporary times, a degree of charismatic clairvoyance has infiltrated the church. Outside distractions open the doors to the prophetic foresight that warns of false prophets in the last days under disguise (1 John 4:3). Those participants give way to itching ears and ideas, not of the counsel of the Lord. Herein lies the great controversy, if those who preach and teach truth and yet commit the same atrocious sins, the object of their explanation, then why would those outside the faith submit? Satan has overwhelmed some churches by planting his minions to mislead believers and turn away those unchurched. The church means to serve as a beacon of light and hope in Christ through the collective gathering of

believers (Prov 27:17). Led by the auspice of his Holy Spirit, the spiritual leader teaches Christ and shows the vision of the Father unto the church proper that they may win those outside the faith unto conversion. Evangelism ultimately is done in the uplifting of the Lord Jesus (John 12:32). The concept can be more readily attainable and understood within the realm of small groups. Participants can gather insight through the knowledge of the Spirit to share and to intervene in the Gospel of Christ. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). Can the role of the church be utilized to address particular issues of dysfunction within certain realms of society? Sexton shows how theology introduces itself to offset dysfunctional behavior. He states, “In several ways displaying an evolved form of prison religion that happened under unique conditions where the inmate churches were able to offer collegiate-level education that then-warden Burl Cain enabled to happen after the 1994 crime bill revoked Pell grant eligibility to convicted felons, and when New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was able to enhance the Inmate Minister Program in this particular setting, with special regard for those serving long-term sentences. This cultivated prosocial behavior among inmates, with an indigenous impulse that nevertheless was something that Louisiana State Penitentiary ‘allows’ to happen, with inmates running their own churches.”73 Hence, the church bears witness to the wrongs committed thereunto by sin that has caused utterances of ill-reform.

Christ, in his many travels and interactions with persons and groups, did not seclude himself to certain types of people, but those in dire need of salvation (Mark 2:17). He went to the

tax collectors, whore-mongers, adulterers, those depraved, the proud, and etcetera; likewise, the church holds itself in obligation (Jas 1:27). Followers of Christ must be his reflection as he is the mirror image of his Father. The Word of God is such that it serves as the solution to the trivial, mundane operations of humankind and the lives lived among sinfulness. Obedience to God in all the given resources he provides enables believers to overcome victoriously in Christ Jesus. As his representation, the healthy obedient church must hold onto Christ, and the will of God as interaction within the world becomes more forthcoming in the sharing of the Gospel. Flexible adaptations must be employed by the church and its parishioners to address the needs of the people effectively and for the Spirit to take up homage in kind. Through small groups, the church spreads benefits in mediation, wellness, and awareness in Christ that achieves a sense of belonging to grow the church exponentially. Just as Christ met with the woman at the well (John 4) and conversed within her means, in like manner, the church must undertake the same pathway. McIntosh says this regarding the church, “The goal is to glorify God by making disciples who follow Christ, not today’s Christian tastes or preferences. Churches that grow will graciously welcome sinful people while showing them there is a better way to live.”

Precepts of a Healthy Church

A healthy church must be surrendered to the providence and majesty of the will of God as Lord of all life and his Holy Spirit as the compelling drive unto Christ Jesus, as Lord. Devout faith in Christ leads to obedience unto the Father to bring him glory and honor among men (Matt 5:16). Therefore, the Christian leader must be attuned and called by God to lead his people with a vision and purpose of fulfillment. Jer 1:5 shows that the Lord has a relationship with his

74 Kirkpatrick, Small Groups in the Church, 23.
75 McIntosh, Biblical Church Growth, 131-132.
creation before conception; however, during the lifetime, it must be rekindled to bring a recollection of rapport. Within the framework of time, Lord God has championed his choice to lead, shape, and cultivate his people for a specified task unto his design.\textsuperscript{76} The healthy church can be looked at as the hospital for the brokenness of the spirit to mend the most critical of issues that plague society. The viewpoint must strictly be placed on Christ as the pinnacle of focus and not of any other human endeavor.

Regarding the leadership of Christ, Malphurs and Penfold share their view, “It is obvious that the Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme Agent of Transformation for all time. He changes individuals, churches, leaders, kings, and nations. His ultimate triumph over sin and death was achieved at the cross and through his subsequent resurrection and ascension.”\textsuperscript{77} An openness of love and tenderness of acceptance is the zeal of the transformed Christian and is accentuated in family devotions.

Through intervention with others outside the faith, cultural practicality should focus on exploring the nuances of sin and how distortion has found itself as introduced. The employment of small groups in church operation yields dividends of benefit unto all involved. Egli and Wang share their view as they state, “If small groups are central to our congregations’ vitality and growth, it is pivotal that we better understand the factors within the groups and within our churches that fuel healthy group growth.”\textsuperscript{78} Simultaneously, delving into the light of all subjects that enhance the will of God must accentuate a relative fashion.\textsuperscript{79} The church has the mandate to

\textsuperscript{76}Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, \textit{Re: Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 37.

\textsuperscript{77}Malphurs and Penfold, \textit{Re:Vision}, 46.

\textsuperscript{78}Egli and Wang, “Factors that Fuel,” 135.

\textsuperscript{79}Keller, \textit{Center Church}, 109.
take the time to address the needs of the people through prayer, supplication, and service to be rendered. Jas 1:27 states, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” This verse becomes the mission of many churches in evangelical efforts to come to the aid of others.

The Church in Decrepit Decline

Due to experience with individuals that constitute the administration and leadership of the church, some find it challenging to work out differences and move on in forgiveness. To be begrudgingly obstinate with your fellow brethren and not seek council from the elders, especially from Lord God, will cause dispersal and break within church operation (Mark 11:26). There are many reasons one can give for their departure, however valid they may be, it is prudent to adjoin yourself to a healthy household of faith (1 Cor 15:58). Remain affixed in Christ and acknowledge the Father, and he will direct your pathway (Prov 4:4-6). Meyer concludes that a life in Christ must be displayed as enjoyable “To be an effective mediating institution, the quality of congregational life should be inviting. Since pressure from peers to give up or compromise Christian faith was intense in Peter’s day, and because media and popular opinion are insidiously persuasive in our own time, winsome congregational life in all aspects—worship, socializing, and good works in the community—attracts and helps keep believers in the fold. Worshipping every Sunday informs lives of vocation in the world.”

80 Therefore, in contrast, Brenner has utilized the variable of identity as to how one may see him or herself concerning church operation. He states, “These findings suggest that actual levels of American attendance are lower
than conventional survey estimates suggest and have been for the last four decades. . . .

Overreporting, in this light, is not about who we are, but rather, about who we think we are.**81

Ascertaining a workable knowledge of the church within the psyche of the individual requires personal honesty and a staunch relationship in Christ. Ignorance of the truth works from being attainable to the fact through listening and hopeful application. It is not up to the one who is lifting Christ (John 12:32) but in the decision-making process of the one in the receipt of Christ. He or she must allow the Holy Spirit homage by indwelling. The scope of this study is relational, meaning it must be so ingrained into the mainstream of societal operation until it is understood.

The family, looking at the issues of the problem within the world today, is noticeable. This study shows a better way through faith to address and ultimately eradicate these dysfunctions by giving them freely to the Father (1 Pet 5:6-7). Therefore, to relate with willing participants, the methodology portion has to be very understandable and user-friendly. The word of God became flesh through the manifestation of the Son by the Father (John 1:1-4); hence, the church by definition is not made with brick and mortar, not by man’s hands (1 Cor 6:19). Therefore, the requirement for understanding is in regression by surrender. Forgoing self-will and embracing the will of God through Christ is the mark of maturation in the Holy Spirit to be made anew in his likeness. There is an attack within this temporal realm that involves forces greater than humanity; moreover, humanity is loved so thoroughly that salvation was sent and made manifest that humankind may live (John 3:16-17).

What Transpired?

The condition of the present global crisis has greatly impacted the normality of life in the way humanity thinks, prepares, operates, plans, and interacts with one another. The pandemic of COVID-19 affects life to the point of death and has become the primary focus in most families. However, as demanding as the virus has become over the past year in claiming the lives of millions, Lord God still reigns supreme (Matt 22:32). Families can find solace and rest in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). Thornton shares his stoic view on the family dynamic and the church, he states, “If family worship is to flourish again, it must make dynamic contact with the central needs of family members at all ages; it must overcome the heavy repression on sharing religious experiencing that pervades our culture today; and it must strike fire first in the family experience of us who lead the churches of the land.”\(^8^2\) The way the church has operated within the past months has been from the standpoint of social media to adhere to social distancing guidelines and to keep the numbers of those affected at bay. The new normal has cemented a way of worship in the family proper by attendance being made utilizing media devices and fellowshipping with familial members in the Holy Spirit.

This particular section delves into the family structure regarding the way worship and praise are conducted between one another in the home and how small groups within the church operation have become a benefit. Six families were asked two questions before the data collection. The two questions proposed from appendix D are as follows, 1) Have you committed to family devotions (either 1 on 1, as a couple, or as a family), such as specific prayers, meditations, or in song – how has this impacted the health of your home life? 2) Have you

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participated in small groups at your church, if so, in what ways has your involvement affected the home life?

**Family A**, represented by the mother/wife is a newly formed family that is still finding its way in the culmination of the Spirit. The mother/wife stated as a girl she was brought up in church, but not as a necessity, she always felt a need to be aligned in Christ. She grew up to respect the premise of the overall church in the goodness and wholesomeness that it represents but still had reservations about the persons who were in certain roles of leadership in the church. Therefore, skepticism abounded. She stated that she believed in Jesus Christ and had accepted him as personal Lord and Savior; however, there were still holes that needed to be filled in her life. Finding her way in coming to a point of acceptance in her life, she found a new love in her third marriage for her and her son. This new unit has been together for five years and a lot has happened as life placed its demands that warranted immediate attention. Her husband was devout and grew up in the church his whole life from the country. He believed in prayer and exemplifying a life unto Christlikeness and doing the right thing in faithfulness unto God. The new family attended church faithfully and all seemed well, family discussions would ensue that were supported by Scripture, and inclusion of weekly meetings in the church to fulfill small group obligations was done by the husband.

Death, loss, grief, and trauma have a way to thwart what has been established and cause a schism of change. This is what occurred with the death of valued family members and the pastor himself, as he had succumbed to the pandemic. At present, the family has not gone to church, either in person or through social media. The son is not doing well or as expected in school nor does he seem to be as respectful to his mother as he should. The mother/wife knows that in Christ there is the peace that surpasses all understanding and has stated that a return unto the
Lord in surrender would greatly benefit the family. A determined desire must rest within to become what the Father has instilled from the physical and psychological facets of the human composition. She desperately wants to get back to where she was and surpass that point in spiritual maturation; however, the proverbial but stands in the way of progress.

Family A has experienced the goodness and benefit of family devotions and small group determination in the church. Somewhere along life’s way it has allowed the dictates and the way of the world to come between their concentration in Christ. The mother/wife knows it must first occur within herself by surrender and then in togetherness with her husband in Christ. The healthiness in his Spirit, she believes, will return.

Family B is derived from Central America (Peru) where lifestyle and culture are vastly different from what is accustomed in the U. S.; however, the God we serve is the same loving God of mercy and grace. The wife, minister unto God, and her husband were found by Christianity at an early age and were the cause of their union together. She stated that as a newly wedded couple they would pray together in harmony as they awoke daily and when they retired for the night. In every venture, whether in prosperity or dire need, they would take it to the Lord in prayer. These practices were in place as their children were coming onto the scene by which they too adopted and now practice themselves as commonplace. In their home country, churches were small and usually held in the homes of families. Small group activities were bound to singing hymns, praying together and for one another, and in the teaching of Scripture in detailed Bible studies. After being told to move to the States by the Spirit, the wife stated that God told her to come here to teach and encourage families to stay the course of Christ.

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She later shared with me that in a vision she was given the insight to do a social media evangelistic review that would encompass the church and the very teachings of Christ. When sharing the idea with her husband, he became irate and stated that the church building is the needed centralized locale to hold such endeavors. She said that God is good and very mysterious and has a way to allow things to materialize for his vision to come to fruition. At present, the social medium is the way individuals are worshipping due to the COVID-19 restriction. The family has been and will continue to involve themselves in devotions and small groups within the church. They have become increasingly close with one another, but more importantly to God as their health is his glory (Jas 4:8). In coming into a recognition of God, Thornton shares his take by stating, “God-consciousness is being fully awake. It is being awake to our full humanity and also to the fullness of reality that exceeds our humanity.”

Family B has benefitted immensely, grown greatly in the Lord, and will continue to present themselves in devotionals and small group settings.

Family C, presented by the husband/father has been through a myriad of trials and tribulations but still manages to have and keep a cemented joy about themselves by keeping a determined focus on Christ Jesus. Growing up as a boy, the husband/father knew the importance of having a detailed relationship in Christ as his grandmother and family instilled such valuable teachings in the reading and studying of Scripture. Church attendance and a devout work ethic were a must. Therefore, as a young man coming into adulthood and having a compelling to find that special someone, he knew that success had to be born of God. He stated that he can attest that God does answer prayer as the Lord had given him a loyal Christian woman who is committed to being surrendered unto his will and to know and learn of her role as wife/mother.

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84 Thornton, Raising God-Consciousness, 77.
The two would have Bible discussions and prayer sessions with one another and were involved in the church through small groups in the choir, deacon board, and teacher’s meetings.

Per the union of what has been established in the Spirit unto the husband and wife, the same filtered down into the rearing of their two children and ultimately their grandchildren. Hence, a generational transference of family health has been assimilated from the husband and wife as a couple, then unto their children as they became parents, and ultimately unto the grandchildren proper. Indeed, resulting from purposeful practice in family devotion and within the small group setting in the church, this family experiences healthy maturation. There was the connectivity of spiritual proportion that emanated from within that fused a bond between members as discussions were held about the struggles of life and in how trust, patience, faith, and dependability in the Lord helped calm and soothe situations of issue. He stated that the biggest fulfillment of spiritual maturity comes when those he has taught, guided, led, prayed for, advised, and utilized spiritual inspiration to encompass the mandates of life and the rigors that present themselves along the way to find joy and rest among trouble. He says his children have benefitted to the point that they have, in turn, become teachers themselves directly and indirectly.

He says he has learned what it is to lead by being a good follower of the will of God first, then from those put in his inner circle (wife), to be able to discern and to envision Spiritually what Lord God has laid before him. The mother/wife, a songbird in the choir, inspired many with her melodious tones of goodness and lyrical teachings. She also involved herself in many charitable ventures of benevolence. Positiveness in Christian parenting and submission to the will of God produces healthy results. A life without Christian attainment in the Spirit in the rearing of the children brings about all sorts of dysfunctional decay. Knabb and Pelletier
conclude, “Certainly, recurring experiences of perceived hopelessness, worthlessness, or unlovability in childhood may contribute to subsequent episodes of depression in later life.”

The family C children became the parents they are today because their parents installed Christian devotions at home (prayer, fasting, mediations, song, teaching, and reading Scripture). The most maturation came at the involvement of youth-oriented programs at church, choir ventures, and district competition Bible drills. The gift that keeps on giving is the inexhaustible hope by faith that the Lord is good, and his mercies are everlasting, even though humanity is not. The husband stated that “without family devotions and small group interventions in the church setting aligned in the Holy Spirit, we would begin to fathom what repercussions would have befallen us.”

Family D, characterized by the husband/father as the spokesperson, is overly grateful to the compassionate and loving Triune God of mercy and grace. Finding his eventual wife in college as sweethearts early in life, the two were estranged for many long and eventful years. Then, seemingly in a simultaneous effort in prayer the two found one another via social media and rekindled a friendship. The two had been in unbecoming situations but both were and still are devout Christians and surrendered to Christ Jesus as Lord. Church has always been at the forefront of their lives and spirituality was a mainstay. Somehow, both kept missing the mark. Prayer does change things and as the Holy Spirit revealed to him, he told his love that they were to be married and she agreed. The two did not have much tangibly, however, love thrived at the union of dad, mom, and son, all three had and still have a deep and rich wealth in the Lord

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through trust, faithfulness, and surrender unto obedience. The couple would pray the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chr 4:10, the family instituted a gathering every last Friday of the month as to where issues of the heart could be presented on the table, and no resentment or animosity was allowed. Total communication and a release of pressure were offered as the other two sat, cried, and listened intently. Prayers were incorporated at mealtime and not just a blessing, but a prayer of thanksgiving, increase awareness, and salvation for the lost.

Noticeable lines of communication emerged between all three members, even to the point of opening and sharing deep intimate gems. These measures of communication within the family enabled the members to interact on deepened levels among others at work, school, church, and in public as a whole. The Lord opened the windows of heaven for the family to the point where the couple had to pray for a ceasing, but never a leaving of blessing. The husband/father became enriched to the point of giving his life to the Lord to serve his people and the Lord blessed him with a new job making more money and a wealth of benefits. The mother/wife has become more attuned to the Holy Spirit and in receipt of his blessings by starting a new business and being blessed with two new jobs and positions. The son is thriving in school to the point he has changed to the school of his choice and is now being educated at the University of Texas, McLennan Community College, and the University of Texas at Arlington; all while attending high school in the eleventh grade. The Father has even blessed this union to move into a new home in the coming months, God is good.

Lord God has touched the small groups in the church to be the reasoning for the success of the atoning work of the Spirit within their lives. The father/husband teaches and leads prayers, all while directing and spearheading specialized groups to address social issues in the community. The mother/wife has been a blessing to those the Lord presented her with daily. She
is positioned to help those in dire need of breaking the most difficult of habits. The son is
growing and maturing exponentially and has been an asset to friends, family, and strangers alike.
He has been given the uncanny ability to possess spiritual vision and deduce detail to the most
complicated of issues. The family knows that the church is the individual surrendered to Christ
and the lives lived to become the ministry dedicated unto God as he purposes per his will.
Growth and maturity are ever vigilant within the framework of this family and the health of their
spiritual wealth can be viewed, witnessed, and shared with others (Matt 5:16).

Family E, represented by the husband, has been committed to the excellence of the
Gospel from early in their individual lives. Being reared in the church and knowing Christ
allowed each one to be led by the Holy Spirit toward one another and eventually to matrimony.
The wife knew since she was a girl that a life submitted to Christ can be one of great importance.
This recognition aforementioned is not of her acknowledgment but unto the glory of the Father
and how he instills and utilizes her life to make him glorified. The husband has a rich heritage in
his walk with Christ, to point of being called to convey a distinct and concise message to the
people of God and those who thirst and hunger for truth in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Submission unto sublime obedience is paramount in this household to dignify a
faithfulness in the Lord in every endeavor of their lives, whether individually, as a couple,
family, friends, acquaintances, strangers, or even enemies, Christ must shine through (John
12:32). Therefore, the crux of family health is in the embrace of godliness and direct accord with
the communication unto the Lord. The husband has a stance on his relationship with his maker
by being utterly transparent with him first, then with himself. This relatability enables the
partnership of interaction through prayer, supplications, meditations, spiritual vision, and
discernment so intently significant and purposeful in kingdom building. The husband says he has
led and encouraged a healthy prayer life with his wife and in the study of Scripture; the family has grown and has accepted the role of humility through the lens of meekness with great expectation. He alludes to the fact that the family devotions have culminated in a process of maturation that is occurring with no end in sight. The process is a testament to divine sanctification and ultimate salvation.

The husband has shared the success of their relationship in the Lord with others through invitation by the inclusivity of Bible studies, prayer time, and disclosure of what the Lord has done in their lives. The vision of the pastor is to promote small group activity and encourage the participation of members to invest their time and service to grow corporately and individually in spirit. As one assistant minister, the husband has noticed that home devotionals have created a zeal to give more and to learn more of God in the church setting by being participatory in small group settings. In small groups, the ministry can be fine-tuned to reach, teach, and edify others in Christ Jesus under the auspice of his Holy Spirit. A partiality toward the musical inclination of the Gospel has suited the family well, as the Lord has blessed the two to magnify him in song and through instrumentation. The husband has been doing so since his college days dating back to 1997. The wife sang in the choir, and he played in the band. To this very day, the couple serves in this capacity at their current church affiliation, with his additional preaching and teaching and her commitment to the praise dance team. The small group endeavor has allowed the couple to reach others on a smaller scale, to be purposeful in charitable blessings, and to be able to effectively witness and evangelize to those in need. The thing the husband has noticed the most is the process of growth and being able to accept change positively or unfavorably. He says, no matter the situation, God is still Lord, and he is in control of all things. He is sovereign and humanity is not.
Finally, **Family F** embodied a picturesque vision of brokenness, reestablishment, and a level of contentment that illustrates the very meaning of tranquility. The husband tells of the tumults he experienced in life that ultimately showed him that the Lord had better plans for him. Many trials and tribulations befell him leading him ever closer to the Lord for answers, peace, and resolve. He was taught early on as a lad from his elders that life must be dictated from a Holy Spiritual perspective in the release of selfishness and an embrace unto righteousness that this world cannot simply offer. He quickly learned that life is a process of Lord God’s betterment internally while bringing him deserved glory.

His endeavor with the Lord led him to be wed unto a sweet young lady whom he adores and cherishes to the last. The wife has also had a life of turmoil and been at the point of no return until she too found the sweet taste of the Lord and his goodness (Ps 38:4). She concluded that life presented way more meaning being subject to the will of God and he had to have something wonderful in store for life. It came in the form of her meeting Mr. Wonderful, not only in their union together as husband and wife, but progressively constant in the spiritual growth and maturation as children of the Most High. She knew of the Lord’s diligence in their marriage and the health of their family as the two receiving continual confirmation. The couple is not sharing a life devoid of trouble, sin, loss, grief, or strife; but they are alluding to the fact that a life in Christ brings about peace, joy, and rest as his Comforter adds serenity during troubled times. A noticeable press in Spiritual relationship and togetherness was ultimately realized amid in-home devotions and the small group endeavor in church. Even in times of trouble peace and joy were still at the forefront.

How does one get to this point in a relationship with the Lord and one another within the confines of a family? Can family members be a caveat between the church the unchurched
within the community? Smith has this comment to share, as he states, “The Church is not a place in which the poor are forgotten, nor can we fully separate and compartmentalize our theology, our ethics, and our scripture. The body of Christ and the gospel of justice for the marginalized are irrevocably intertwined.”

The husband answers this question with Scripture, which has become the backbone of his renewed life, he quotes, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). They have learned that this life cannot be lived alone devoid of Christ but is transformed anew by the mind to be submissive unto his will (Rom 12:1-2). Therefore, the couple has shared that they hold purposeful Bible study at least twice a week and pray together on what was learned. They conveyed individually to one another following the layout of their day and expectations on a hopeful tomorrow. The couple shared that they believe that these devotions have strengthened their marriage to communicate better and to understand one another holistically. Communication with others (friends, acquaintances, strangers, and even enemies) has been enhanced.

Being thoroughly involved in a church that has become an enriching component of their lives has greatly benefitted the couple. The husband’s walk with Christ has led him to be inclined spiritually to convey detailed and sermonized messages of hope to the people of God. He serves as president of the Men’s Union and sings periodically in the choir. He states that his small group involvement has led him to many realizations about his life and mission in the Lord. It has given him a perspective on his behavior and awareness of his habits in and out of the home setting. Knabb and Pelletier conclude that small group-based relationships within the church builds bonds of cohesive learning through adaptation and recognizing faithfulness while growing with

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others through Christ. Learning and discussing the word of God with other men has enabled him to vent, appreciate varying viewpoints, and receive spiritual insight and good advice from the spiritual walk others have in Christ in a more concise and natural setting.

The wife is more of a behind-the-scenes type of person, which is highly needed in support of thematic programming. She is involved in many committee ventures that spearhead the vision of the church in fund-raising, décor building, culinary arts, and simply being a good and effective listener to those in need. She indicates that she has grown much in her time at the church and as a wife to her husband. She relishes the moments of question and answers during home devotion.

Gathering the information of these families indicates that the God we serve is missional and relational. The assessment not only illustrates a conditional relationship with one another, whether through the familial genre or interacting with those outside the family, but a more in-depth and meaningful sense of belonging that also exists when the prevalence of the Holy Spirit is experienced. Therefore, confirmation is garnered, and healthiness prevails as one matures in the Spirit and gains acknowledgment of a touch from the divine. The family surely benefits along many panes of existence when the home secures itself to detailed devotions that are purposely committed thereunto. As growth among the small group became inevitable, an acknowledgment within the home, self, and the church proper seemed to become more intrinsic in how change employed positive increase. One can experience intimacy with the Lord along the lines of faith and not that of practicality through some logical means. The closeness with and through him enables the same to be experienced with those nearby, the family. Harvey touches upon the teachings of Paul in his downplay of the family by accentuating the importance of life in Christ.

Harvey states, “It is to suggest that what leads him to this conclusion is his overwhelming sense that the crucified and risen Christ represents and empowers life in the new age. This new identity means possibilities for human living hitherto unimaginable, in the light of which the law is seen to have fulfilled its role as nursemaid and the family is, shall we say, revitalized.” These qualities start to exude trust, forgiveness, hope, and unspeakable joy within the realm of the tight-knit family that ultimately promotes health. Therefore, as members of the family in Christ, members can be utilized to build and enforce biblical truths and Gospel facts unto those unchurched. Such efforts could be specified through small church groups to advance kingdom building. Carter shares his view by stating, “On biblical grounds, one has to affirm that devout use of the numerical approach is in accord with God’s wishes.”

There must be a spiritual awakening unto rebirth and renewal in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Piper concurs in his assessment by stating, “To be a living spirit, or to have spiritual life, Jesus says we must be ‘born of the spirit.’ Flesh gives rise to one kind of life. The Spirit gives rise to another kind of life. If we don’t have the second kind, we will not see the kingdom of God.”

Once this “born again” transformation comes to fruition in the Father’s sanctification, as a believing family, then dysfunctional behavior will diminish, and a more acceptable life into Christ will become common-place. Family C experienced many setbacks along the way of their journeyed lives. They noticed that through family devotions and a determined dedication to the small group in the church that they were enabled to overcome. They also relayed their


90 Piper, “Finally Alive”, 36.
astonishment in the rest and joy experienced even in tumultuous times. This family, the members thereof who participated in the questionnaire and interview has grown and deeply matured resulting from the small groups and family devotions. This benefit has been experienced generationally, even unto the grandchildren.

The variance of the church in how it relates and affects dysfunctional behavior is where other avenues could meet consideration. One major step could be to study those who do not profess a belief in Christ who look for other means of coping. What are their belief systems? To where are the alliances of dependability placed? How are fail-safe mechanisms viewed in place of negligence? How did one develop this sense of belief? Does denominational or non-denominational membership carry any validity or credibility? The answers to these questions lie within the cognitive framework of those individuals who live, believe, and carry out their lives in specified accordance. In effect, this study could be ongoing and unveil many determinants of the known and enlighten the populace through the unknown. These entanglements become the beauty of research.

The local church benefited the healthy family and also experienced an increase in many ways, such as membership building/retention, education/awareness, witnessing, evangelism, and in community recognition. Dysfunctional behavior was met, realized, and addressed in togetherness to bring about coping measures, acceptance, and reassurance that supports hope. Reliance in the realm of Christ brings together peace, harmony, and balance; therefore, as the family draws closer to God through devotions, gets involved in small groups at church, and each member becomes active in a charitable cause, then betterment occurs by the Father. Exercising a reliance on the Lord places a dependence on Him who can overcome (John 16:33). Revelation by
relationship in the Lord brings new meaning through the lens of the Spirit. Jesus Christ is the eye at the center of the storm.

Generational evidence was brought into the fray as children who were reared in such a way employed some of the same techniques within their own families and even through varying occupations tend to show signs of beneficial improvement. Thornton alludes to the importance of awareness and recognition in God as growth is experienced by stating, “The recovery of worship rituals in family life promises to meet basic needs for meaning, to enrich relationships, and to open up the sharing of religious experience with one another. The enrichment of family life occurs, paradoxically, to the degree that the family’s purpose is not to enrich itself but to subordinate itself to the worship of God and the enjoyment of His Presence in the family’s corporate life.”

The study illustrated that a submissive willingness toward the components of family devotions and small group interaction in the church are the key imperatives that promote health and growth. Within the underpinnings of the methodology phase, this study will unearth expectations of anticipation; simultaneously, the unknown may become more evident in the upcoming section.

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Chapter 4

Results: Data Findings

Expectations on how the perceived results will unfold relating to others can move into the utterance of an afterthought. No one can know the outcomes. This unknown is the beauty of research. Having personal bias and ambiguity on the part of the researcher must remain suppressed to gain a broader perspective on the coattails of those within the research pool. The dynamics of this contemporary age are so plentiful and numerous that one cannot merely surmise a detailed platform from whence a person will derive. There is, however, the enormous hindrance that plagues the world today; COVID-19. The pandemic has altered so many life courses, ways of thought, future planning, the way humankind views the term of normalcy, and in some areas COVID-19 has taken center stage of life itself. No matter how the number of infections and deaths rise across the globe due to this phenomenon, it is no match for the excellent presentation of Lord God and His immense power to subdue anything this feeble world can muster (Hebrews 1:1-4). Even at this, the world and life press on with the same dysfunctional behaviors added to more issues of concern, such as erratic weather patterns, racial tensions, politics, world dilemmas (rumors of war), and the like escalate. There is a more vivid calling for salvation to bring peace, decency, and order to a chaotic world-class system bent on individualism that emphasizes a deep concern for self-interests. Where can one turn? To whom can the world call upon change? How can man solve the pressing problems of minutia within the household? Paul speaks of the urgency for change and the betterment of times to come in Christ Jesus, “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:22-23).
Utilizing research and creating boundaries to formulate and analyze material for measure poses a challenge. These challenges are due to the uncertainty of the human condition and the willingness to participate in truthfulness. Qualitative research can best evolve in the realm of quantitative settings. Therefore, the thought processes that matured over time are based on experience and lived occurrence, expressing qualitative caveats, such as the interview and the survey. Vyhmeister concurs as she states, “Because of the depth and volume of information obtained in an interview, the number of persons interviewed is much smaller than the number of those surveyed. Remember, qualitative research does not deal with numbers, but with ideas and people.”92 The measurable formation of the survey and the interview questioning can gain perspective from one answer concerning the next. This measurability is the crux of numerical systems in quantitative research.

Tools of Measure

There are multiple facets of this study in establishing set parameters to gain recognition from the participants. These components are needed to find correlation in the realms of faith, family devotions, relational togetherness, overall levels of belief, and the enterprise of the church in the small group setting. The gathering place of like-minded individuals in Christ, primarily in society, is the church building. However, as spiritual maturity grows and Holy Spirit enlightenment is bestowed, one concludes that the church is the believer and not the building (1 Cor 6:19). Individuals mature at varying levels of a rate that is closely monitored by the Father as he deems fit for his overall design in kingdom building. Once the believer acquires an acknowledged awareness, then progress, better understanding, and fluid prosperity can be vividly obtained through spiritual vision and discernment. The interviewee had many nuances to

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92Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Student of Religion and Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 42.
consider when positioning a workable mindset for achievement. As he or she pondered the family setting, which family was under consideration? The family from whence one came, comprised of the father, mother, siblings, and self could be one avenue; simultaneously, the family you are currently a part of, which houses your spouse, children, and yourself could be another. The study bases itself on the discretion of the participants, which allows for consistency to be sought to impress upon the firmness of finding and discovery. Each participant individually or as a family unit will possess similar and contrasting traits but will yield concrete results.

Lord God’s Diligence

Therefore, staunch awareness in a healthy belief of who God is regarding the self, this life, and by the inclusion of the world is highly paramount. Salvation is the motivational factor that compels Christians in their pursuit of the Lord and establishment in what is next. Hence, diligence in him relates to a pathway of healthy lives lived. One can follow by allowance without delay to trust in him. Humanity must have a special rapport with him (John 14:6). One can simply let go and let him have his way by the indwelling of his Spirit. Exercising your faith and stepping out into the unknown solidifies your walk and bond with Christ as he opens doors and provides pathways by which to travel.

Obedience unto the Lord, as it pertains to scripture, garners one to be in the perfection of harmony with the majestic triune God of mercy and grace. As the healthy individual matures spiritually within the healthy family, then change for the better can be noticed. The formation of a family must occur in the Holy Spirit. He will bring awareness by inspiration, an enhancement of faith level, and devotion by commitment unto the Father to permeate a love that overflows onto others.
Focus section 1 of the questionnaire in Appendix A, God’s Formation of the Family, gave some intriguing results that caused the participants to contemplate long and hard to ascertain a knowledgeable truth to meet the criteria presented.

See Figure 1 chart breakdown:

![Chart breakdown]

This chart culminated in the first of six focused sections presented to the participant pool. There were five principles and questions within Focus Section 1, and the range of scale on the questionnaire for each item was from 1 to 5, with 1 being (little), 3 being (Some), and 5 being (much). Take notice that questions, according to the legend on the left, for numbers 1 through 3 indicated a more substantial presence of assuredness in response to the questions presented. It speaks of personal faith and a more relational rapport with the Lord from an intimate position. There is a more concrete foundation in answering specific questions when it relates to the self as opposed to your perception of others. Items 4 and 5 fell within the realm of some, indicating that some questioning received lower marks than the previous three. The survey shows that participants display knowledge of God’s lordship, personable relationships, and endearing interactions with one another. To gain a meaningful perspective in understanding and
committing to family devotions and the small group endeavor, one must know God and come to know themselves accordingly.

The key and primary intent were to emphasize that God is the one who formulates, nurtures, and matures the family structure through obedience, trust, and a devout prayer-life within his Spirit unto Jesus Christ. This rapport, through family devotion, promotes health and dependence on him to be all that the family will ever need (Prov 4:19). The underpinning by understanding comes into the vividness of new focus as one submits into his Spirit.

Focus section 2, Acknowledgement of and Personal Identity in Christ, offers a shift of sorts within the paradigm of the study, meaning many answers were sparse from low to medium with few tangents of high-end responses.

Take notice of Figure 2 chart breakdown below:

The world, unaware of Jesus Christ, may have recognition and an understanding of who God the Father is by acceptance or denial. Hence, concern rests in the surrender of the self-unto the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. There is a warring faction occurring within the delicate framework of the human composition toward the outer areas of interaction.
Sin can make a person think in a way that is very unbecoming of the Lord God and can cause one to be at direct enmity with him. The accumulated numbers for this section seem to be lower from the standpoint of uncertainty or just a weakened assurance in the relationship one may have regarding Christ. Some view Jesus as a merely good man and not as Lord. The hypo-static union made him 100% man, and it also made him 100% divine. Therefore, precedence is set in the realm of belief and in the halls of faith that he is the Son of God (Heb 11:6). The two questions within section two look at the family collectively with intent regarding the deity of Christ and how the patterns of life reflect the totality of his being. A thorough connection, in the truest sense, rests within family gatherings by devotions as the intent to commune, thereby promoting health.  

Qualitative research is congruent with the data tools utilized to garner a response that will bolster or accentuate the study methodology. An articulated sampling of answer availability according to choice, can show a better illustration when explaining variation. These fluctuations can dictate meaning to prove or disprove a point based on its validity and authenticity. The questionnaire will bring about expectations and raise intrigue. The study concluded that this section showed that participants were not as confident as expected. To merely know of Christ is nothing compared to living Christ. Results were moderate indicating non-assuredness.

Peering into focus section 3, Reflecting God’s Grace in the Fulfillment of Faith, the questionnaire comes to its most extensive section with a representation of six principles and questions. There is a more in-depth requirement in the thought process to search the family structure and the hidden areas of the self.

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93 Thornton, “Raising God-Consciousness,” 76.

94 Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 80.
At first glance, one could surmise that the averages are moderate or slightly above the median. In some cases, there were shallow responses, and in others, there were very high responses. It looked at salvation being a gift and not an obligation by Lord God unto humanity, meaning by his grace and not by merit. The struggle is in the notion of sacrifice and the unknown that faith poses outside the feeble resources that humankind can create. Working in the Lord’s acknowledgment is not enough. However, in faith and through a belief that Lord God is able and unfailing brings his word to fruition (1 Thess 1:3). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit must well cement the establishment of the Savior by the Lordship of Christ. He died for the sins of the world, of those who believe in him and accept him. Just as he sacrificed for humankind, will humanity sacrifice for him?

How does one view and perceive a pure sense of what it means to be holy? It most certainly is considered to be a specialty in the pristine sense of being immaculate. Coming into the fullness of Lord God, there must be a striving to be as Lord God is. This zeal in Christ occurs when a workable knowledge of his love is felt, observed, and witnessed, even when being punished in wrongdoing. Lord God is Father of those who accept him, “… because the Lord
disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Heb 12:6).

Therefore, remaining in his will is paramount.

Relationally, members of the healthy formed family in God’s grace demonstrate a closeness that is so encouraged that it would be unthinkable to come between its members. Thornton concludes that “Only as we gain some clarity about what is central for family goals and needs can we move with confidence toward the reconstruction of rituals for family devotion that will be potent in family experience today.”\(^95\) Therefore, the bond would lead to a kind of Christlikeness among family members and a more acceptable notion onto the realm of forgiveness. The importance of communication is imperative within any arena of fellowship. The kingdom of God is no different, so neither should this temporal world be devoid of prayer nor contact with Lord God. The study revealed that participants felt a sense of personal representation in the Lord when interacting with one another. Scores indicate that not many were too sure in their assessments. To show and reflect Christ in a life lived is to exemplify his characteristics openly. Closeness in devotions and small groups enhances such qualities. This section posed many hidden nuggets of specialized allegiance in the rapport with Lord God.

Focus section 4, Faith that Works, intended to illustrate that by concentrating on Lord God as provider, sustainer, and deliverer, no matter the situation, Lord God is able (Luke 1:37). The resulting responses of these three sets of questions and principles hovered over the median range of the answer scale.

\(^95\) Thornton, “Raising God-Consciousness,” 77.
See Figure 4 chart breakdown:

Heb 10 talks about the perseverance in faith amid tumults. Frustration rises because of sin, which plagues humanity. Togetherness by like-mindedness in Christ Jesus serves as a healing platform that he may be amid collective concern (Matt 18:20). Understanding doctrine about the community and levels of faith by determination unto others lends to bring a greater understanding. The Holy Spirit gives confirmation and guidance as a means of placement, according to Christ. The family must endure the process of the Father’s sanctification as they seek to find growth and dependence in the Lord. Within his providence, one can come to a determination by the destination of who they indeed are in the Father’s grand scheme of kingdom building. Although this may be a personalized endeavor, collectively within a setting of Christ-like individuals, learned experiences can be shared, and growth in faith experienced.

Donahue and Gowler content that there are historical factors attributed to small group emphasis; they state, “Wesley’s conception of group life employed gatherings that existed apart from and in addition to regular weekly church services. The purpose of these groups included accountability and spiritual formation, being organized into societies (gatherings of 20-50 people), classes (averaging 10-15 members), and bands (groups of 4-5) for catechesis and mutual encouragement
toward spiritual progress." As one flourishes in the relational rapport in Christ and comes to know that there is dependence in him, a committed and continued prayer life is paramount. To be like Christ, one must become Christ in the most real sense of his abidance by the indwelling of his Spirit. Therefore, a healthy prayer life should exhibit the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). The study indicates that scores were firm in assuredness with noticeable room for growth. An enriched life in godliness makes one better and more fulfilled.

Focus section 5, Sin, the Causality of Dysfunction, was expected to be the most difficult. Sin is so cunning and deceptive that it was pre-determined that participants would find other avenues for blame as a basis for dysfunction. However, the three principles and questions proved to result in a higher viewpoint as a result.

See Figure 5 chart breakdown:

![Figure 5 chart breakdown](image)

There is no defeating sin without the indwelling presence of Christ in the life of God’s people. A relationship was evident as God conversed with Cain, but he had already allowed

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himself displacement from the Lord as the seed of malice and envy was planted firmly deep within. God said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Gen 4:7). The big misnomer in the sin nature is a disregard for Lord God as the head of the lives lived. It emphasizes the self, the very resource one comes to be blessed with by God (Jas 1:17).

The hope of salvation is in Christ Jesus as he did die for the sins of the whole world. The importance is placed by the Father with all power in heaven and earth in his hands (Matt 28:18). Therefore, living in the totality of the life of Christ as heirs to the throne of grace, as maturity in the Lord progresses, teaching those close becomes utterly imperative. The establishment of belief can be accentuated by those near, such as family members or even church members; only God can cement a trust by the indwelling of his Spirit. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life for no one comes unto the Father but by him (John 14:6). Hence, the stronghold of sin by imprisonment can only be unraveled by the Lord. It is in and by your invitation through surrender that enables him to flourish in you.

Paul speaks of anchoring and rootedness in Christ as the tempestuous winds and waves of life try to move and alter ways of direction from the Father (1Cor 15:58). Sin has a way to sugarcoat and make wrongdoing appear as right through the thrill of fleeting pleasures. Members who are more attuned to the Spirit must take time to study, pray, and pray for those who are not, even those outside the family. Sin is real and robust; however, nothing is more powerful than God. He is able. This section of the study yielded high scores on the scale that shows an agreeable measure that sin is real and destructive, as Christ can overcome.

Focus Section 6, The Role of the Church, was pre-determined to be top-heavy and bottom-laden due to the scrutiny the Church has faced over the centuries. The role and
perception of the Church contemporarily have become seemingly a popularity contest at best without regard to salvation. This particular mindset that resonates in some becomes the reasoning for non-participation. However, when an encounter in Christ proliferates, one does not remain the same but infused in his gloriousness to be in the Father’s service. The results of the five principles and questions were lower on the scale but higher than expected.

See Figure 6 chart breakdown:

![Bar chart](chart.png)

- Question 1 (3.4)
- Question 2 (3.6)
- Question 3 (4.3)
- Question 4 (3.7)
- Question 5 (4.1)

Christ initiated the establishment of the church as he spoke to Peter, not the construction of the building itself with brick and mortar, but within the person of flesh and bone (Matt 16:18).

Therefore, the organism that is the Church must be viewed internally as a role participant performing a dutiful task for the building of God’s kingdom, offering a place for refuge for the lost, and a place for healthy growth in spiritual maturation. Members must study to show themselves approved in the work of God and to pray without ceasing earnestly. A strict regimen in scripture opens the pages of his word to unfold in the daily endeavors of life. Exposure to the very foundations of the church is significant in the well-rounded Christian. Through small groups
in the church, a bridge of understanding and marriage of fortified faith can be achieved. Donahue and Gowler share the benefit of small groups of the past, by stating, “In the 1980s, churches began to utilize small groups as a vital or even primary means of building community and growing people in the faith.”

Worship at home first strengthens the bonds of family members, which carry over onto Church members, with all placing Christ as the head. The vision of the Spiritual leader must align with the idea that the Lord instills. These qualities being in cohesion in the Holy Spirit makes for a healthy and prosperous familiarity in the Lord. The expression seems to be easier to write on paper as it is harder to live out and remain committed thereunto. There are so many variants that weigh against the dictates of the Lord. He can overcome them all and has overcome them; this enables believers to do likewise (John 16:33). The auspice of the Church falls under the Holy Spirit unto Christ Jesus our Lord, as the Spiritual leader, serves as the Lord’s under-shepherd. There is a filter down directive from the head being Christ to the most unassuming member in the oneness of connectivity to outreach, witness, educate, praise, worship, and do what the Lord has designed (Eph 2:10).

Solidifying Loose Ends

There was one primary determinant for the participation of the questionnaire, a belief in Jesus Christ. The dilemma rests on whether or not Church attendance from a stance of regularity meant or carried a different quality in faithfulness. Being deeply and thoroughly involved in Church operation by some degree of capacity accentuates and benefits Christian growth. The end of the survey had to have a platform to bring everything and everyone back to the point of origin, which leads to Jesus Christ and, ultimately, salvation. Hence, the supplemental section of the

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97 Donahue and Gowler, “Small Groups,” 120.
questionnaire had to be simple, concise, and direct. The information gathered needed to be a stand-alone venture, in conjunction with the praxis of the questionnaire itself. Sensing stresses a point to the research continuum by adding, “A thick description goes beyond a simple narration that merely delineates the information but explores the deeper and often hidden meanings behind the words, gestures, actions, and practices observed during a project. A thick description explores the possible meanings of a sign.”

The supplemental section, in appendix B, contained four questions that support the premise of the study and yet ties together the questionnaire and the interview questions simultaneously. It offers a “yes” or “no” choice format for answering, thereby giving an easier means to ascertain variance and validity. To be involved in small groups at church, for the advancement of spiritual health, one must be committed to the church. The first question deals with the Church and ordered operations that allow it to thrive and glorify the Father. Is there a willingness for the glory of God in service? Can stimulation derive from spiritual growth? Can those who are lost and or unchurched gain acknowledgment? The church, in Christ, does all these and much more unto God.

QUESTION 1:

Do you regularly attend church on Sundays and/or inclusive of weekly meetings?

YES

NO

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98 Sensing, Qualitative Research, 195.
The onslaught of the pandemic of COVID-19 has wreaked havoc throughout the known world. It has given new meaning and significance to the notion and definition of normalcy within all societies. Therefore, church attendance has taken on new meaning in participation; however, from the aspect of praise and worship, it is still intact. The participants of this study are adversely affected, even after this study. Being believers in Christ, expectations were to be of a higher response; however, due to the strains society is under, it is quite understandable.

Some churches have gone to social media for relief and have become more accustomed to this new era. Although the larger churches (mega) had already explored this arena, the smaller ones have embraced this new way. The overall benefit will be a unique and enriched avenue for all to take place. There are those individuals who are unable to attend due to mobility issues, the ones who are out of town and want to participate in specific services, and those who have to work on Sundays being able to take part when it becomes more feasible. Avoiding technology and the advances it offers tends to catch off guard even the most traditional of persons. The
assembling of like-minded individuals in Christ only enhances the worship experience and strengthens levels of faith (Heb 10:23-25).

The second question looks at salvation and how Jesus Christ is the only way unto it, even to the Father. Can one believe in Christ and not yet accept Him as Savior? The answer is yes. There is a 7% representation for the “no” answers to this question. There cannot be an automatic assumption of everyone being at the point in spiritual growth. There must be a way to teach and live life in Christlikeness. The small group endeavor could be utilized to address specific needs, allow for the sharing of personal concerns, and to conduct practical exercises that emphasize trust.

QUESTION 2:

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

YES

NO

![Pie chart showing Jesus as Personal Lord and Savior]
An encounter with Jesus Christ is by no means confusing or mind-altering. The experience takes one beyond any shadow of a doubt. Awareness and knowledgeable attainment in the fact that you were in his presence quickly present themselves. The 7% should be applauded for honesty and not merely answering the way of expectation. An open opportunity presents availability to pour into a well that wants to be filled with the waters that never become exhausted (John 4:13-14). Yearning for Christ must be the crux of the family in need of healing through devotions to overcome dysfunctional behavior.

Dysfunctional behavior is so prevalent globally until it has become commonplace and, in some venues, socially accepted as usual. This behavior can be innate, and it also can be learned and adopted into the confines of internal agreement. Dysfunctional behavior is the behavioral trait that poses to be at enmity with the normal flow of healthy and proper functionality. Therefore, in the family, the blatant interruption of familial growth and health is considered to be a dysfunctional enterprise.

QUESTION 3:

Have you experienced or been a part of dysfunctional behavior within a family setting? (i.e., Divorce, Drug/Alcohol Abuse, Suicide, Physical Abuse, Bullying, Etc.)

YES  NO
The results are not alarming but somewhat surprising due to the rampant activity contemporarily. A better range of definitions may have been more suitable in case of uncertainty. This area not only becomes a collective concern but also from the standpoint of the individual as well. Now, sexuality becomes more in focus as families are dealing with issues of sexual orientation and preference. Parents are more open to the idea of allowing their children to be themselves and to live following their feelings. This area is a broad spectrum of possibilities due to how one dysfunctional behavior can stem into the realm of another. A drug abuser could try to offset his/or addictions by having a few more drinks to become intoxicated enough to not over-indulge in their drug of choice. Abuse also could lead to brain damage, quite possibly, death. Lord God is the cure and calm needed to bring about peace and decorum to an otherwise dismal situation (Phil 4:7).

Faith in God must first render a knowledge that he is God and able to champion you from the pits of obscurity into his marvelous light. It is in this knowledge that faith spawns into life.
Paul says it best as he addresses the church at Ephesus, “. . . to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph 3:19-20). The Church is the avenue of fellowship to be in co-union with others in Christlikeness. A practical and faithful church understands the reasoning of why things must operate in rightness. McIntosh sheds light on this effect as he states, “Faithful churches become effective not simply because they do the right things but because they understand why the right things need to be done.”99 The formation of small groups within the church can be discretionary for the leader, in line with divine vision, to address particular needs as they may arise. The disbanding of one small group to reform to address a critical need is the luxury of its flexibility.

QUESTION 4:

Do you believe that the operation of the church can aid in faithfulness and increase belief?

   YES                   NO

99 McIntosh, Biblical Church Growth, 25.
This section was a great representation of affirmation as to the Church being the vehicle of Christ to promote God’s grace, Lord Jesus’ teaching, and Holy Spiritual guidance. If the research pool feels this way, would there be more excellent representation in the Church setting from the participants if the pandemic was not in effect? Therefore, a healthy family in the providence of acknowledging God’s grace, which then exercises the same effort within the operation of the Church, could benefit significantly in faithfulness with other members. Bearing the burdens of those in need and utilizing corporate prayer which becomes highly imperative. In the promotion of how the church aids in the healthy family, Jordan concludes, “In dysfunctional church families love lacks genuineness. Conditional love is the order of the day. Love is often reduced to mere sentimentality and pious expressions. But in healthy church families, conscious effort is made to attain and maintain a godlike love that is action oriented, always acting in the best interest of the persons loved.  

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Healthy church growth promotes healthy spiritual growth, and a healthy nurtured family in God accentuates and stimulates the church to increase. The enhancement unto betterment in a walk by faith can be practically assumed in family devotions and church small group endeavors. Donahue and Gowler display the effectiveness of their findings in how church small groups promote family health and bring about spiritual awareness that could benefit local churches:

The data showed that, if nothing else, small groups were a widespread phenomenon. But what sort of impact were such groups having on their participants? At the subjective level, Wuthnow’s survey respondents reported the following (1994b, p. 382):

90% felt close to God; 87% have a deeper love toward others; 84% say that they have experienced the Bible becoming more meaningful to them; 82% have a better ability to forgive others; 75% have experienced answers to prayer; 75% have been helped in sharing their faith.

At a more objective level, the results provided much to celebrate among group advocates (1994b, p. 383):

53% have experienced healing in relationships; 80% have worked with the group to help a needy group member; 72% worked to help a needy person outside the group; 61% have become more interested in peace or social justice; 42% have become involved in volunteer work in the community.

Finally, with respect to observance of religious habits, participants said the following (1994b, pp. 375-379):

85% attended religious services at least once a week; 81% were involved in at least one “special activity, program, or committee”; 47% increased the amount of money they gave to their church or synagogue; 46% donated money to a charitable organization other than their church or synagogue because of the group.101

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The local churches can help and address issues of concern through small groups as the family continues to involve itself in devotions. Such issues of dysfunction are more readily able to be handled and processed, as sharing and caring in the group commences. Better efficiency, in life unto Christ, starts with a vision. Lord God is foresight as he is forever without end (Heb 13:8); therefore, as children of the Most High, alignment in his will is a must. Surrender and obedience pave the way into his graces with the most incredible ease. (1 Sam 16:7). Malphurs and Penfold stress the importance of vision as they state, “Vision is essential to any ministry, whether church or parachurch. Ministry without a clear, God-inspired vision is futile because it fails to articulate what God has called it to do.”

Delving Deeper

The next section of this study is the last research tool portion utilized to gain a greater perspective from a biblical understanding and a practicum of thought. The premise was to pool a smaller sample of pre-selected persons from differing points of view based on parameters of age, biblical knowledge, education, and having a regulatory church life. The participants are a teenaged male, a retired worker and deacon recently re-establishing a church home, and a seasoned clergyman, who is a pastor of a local church. The interview portion consisted of four questions and statements, represented in appendix C, given to the three individuals, to which they were allowed ample time and consideration for the formation of their answers. Given the depth and meaningful variations presented, there is no way to measure the responses quantitatively. Therefore, illustration from a qualitative viewpoint surfaces by giving excerpts of each to differentiate responses.

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STATEMENT 1:

Discuss your assured knowledge regarding faith and how Lord God requires it within the composition of his established sets of institutions, i.e., Government (Authority), Family, (Marriage), and the Church.

**Teenager:** Faith and trust hold many similarities, with faith being the foundation of a relationship with the Father. Therefore, established by God, his institutions must co-exist harmoniously for a smoother transition in operation. The platform set forth for cohesive bonding is in the trusting aspect of its members to do the right thing by integrity. Within the small group of Sunday school, from an early age, these principals were introduced and highlighted.

**Re-established Deacon:** The institutions established by the Father are in operation by believers and non-believers; God is Lord of all. At times, positions of leadership are led by non-believers to carry out the overall goal of the Lord’s design. If the Lord wants things to go in a way unto his will, he will place whomever he chooses to do so to bring his desire to fruition. The overall and underlying premise of Lord God’s operation is love. God is love.

**Pastor:** No matter the type of government, it is ordained of God to keep order and controlling lawlessness. Done properly, it brings terror to evil and accentuates God’s diligence. “Family, in God’s eyes, is between a man and a woman regarding marriage. The church is a spiritual organism, not a social club or a human construct. “In light of these truths, there is no allowance for people wanting to be a part of God’s family to deliberately seek and continue what the Bible defines as dysfunctional, evil, and inappropriate behavior (Genesis 2:21-25; Ephesians 5:22-33). The culmination of small groups, teacher’s meetings, for example, touch upon reaching others.
through the faithful lens that Lord God is good and caring. By putting him first and foremost in every endeavor only heightens his Lordship. Our congregation has benefitted greatly.

STATEMENT 2:

The construction and formation of marriage were done in the Garden of Eden; however, resulting from the disobedient act, the family thereunto was formed. Elaborate how you feel and come to believe that the structural integrity of the healthy family is of divine influence.

**Teenager:** Lord God yearns to have an intimate rapport with all of humanity. In so doing, he wants humankind to have a workable and meaningful relationship with one another. He christened and gave Eve to Adam that he might be adjoined to her and not be alone. In the blatancy of disobedience, the structural family was formed by Lord God; therefore, unification through him is achieved by his grace. The pattern of heaven, in togetherness unto the Father, must be likened to the earthly family.

**Re-established Deacon:** I agree that the family structure is of the divine by the integrity of faithfulness. God, at the head of the family in all sets of situations, whether to work out problems or resolve issues of concern, gets an answer of amicable agreement. The truth may or may not favor their expectations, but it will fall within the Father’s will. Hardships are expectant, or they should dwell in anticipation. If Jesus, the Son of God, faced struggle, who are we as the children of God not to follow in his likeness. Facing and overcoming adversity is the totality of who Christ is and the life he lived on earth.

**Pastor:** Resulting from disobedience, the inclusion of sin became the cause of a fallen and evil nature that consumed the innocence of humankind to many perversions and distortions. In the realm of relationship sin brought about allowable change; a turning from God, men and women
losing desire for one another, men finding a passion for men, and women were giving themselves unto women. Lord Jesus’ supreme sacrifice re-established the horrid condition of humanity under the auspice of his Holy Spirit through the majestic planning of the Father. It is in, through, and by God’s grace that any situation can find the peace and harmony of the Lord into the workings of his sublime health (Matt 5:17-20; Rom 5:12-21; 1John 3:1-10).

QUESTION 3:

The Church is not a building constructed with brick and mortar but a fellowship of like-minded believers in Christ (Prov 27:17). Bringing awareness in combating sin, how does the Church, as a tool of Christ, exalt the Father and address the iniquities of the world?

**Teenager:** “The church cannot save one from sin, that depends on the relationship the individual has with God.” However, there is extreme benefit from the healthy, envisioned church that brings a wealth of growth and advancement to the surrounding community. The platform of the church serves as a beacon for those who may be lost and unchurched, as it brings outreach through evangelistic efforts that can reach around the globe. Our witnessing small group that focuses on evangelism has brought out members closer to God and one another by sharing the Gospel of Christ with those outside the congregation.

**Re-established Deacon:** The obligatory aspect of the under-shepherd and the church by in large has to serve and to react in a purposeful love unto Christ Jesus. The church should not be used in degradation, belittlement, or direct itself toward derogatory sets of issues. Contemporarily, the church has become about the needs and support of the pastor instead of God’s people. As followers of Christ, we become small groups within him, as he brings and sheds light in truth and grace reflective of the Father.
Pastor: “Jesus makes it clear that the church must demonstrate the holy and righteous character of God in all our dealings with others in the world . . . because He calls us SALT, which has the potential to season and preserve the world from destroying itself from sin.” In family devotions, within the home, individual family members can represent Christ well and become more aware of the Father’s vision for the church and the family. The church stands and becomes as through assimilation, a meaningful symbol of the character of one of the two masters as Christ depicts in Luke 16:13. Therefore, in the allowance of worldly beliefs and ungodly issues, then the church becomes useless and serves as a symbol of mockery. Moreover, when the church submits and surrenders to Jesus Christ and allow itself to follow the Holy Spirit into the cusp of the Father’s divine vision, then there is no force in this realm nor any other that can prevail against it (Matt 5:13; Matt 16:17-19; and 1 John 5:1-5).

QUESTION 4:

Sin is real and the lament of humanity as it runs rampant, disrupting and causing chaos by temptation with the allure of fanciful pleasures (1 John 2:16). Do you believe dysfunctional behavior within the family to be the result of such activity? How can faith offset the atrocities?

Teenager: The presence of sin is unchanged and has become a constant in the lives of humankind worldwide. In my view, corruption may not be a cause for the dysfunction of behavior, but a force to enhance the dysfunction one gives him or herself. The abnormal resultants of mental illness can and sometimes does cause dysfunction in a family. However, faith serves as a blatant degree of hope in something greater and more powerful than ourselves, enabling resolve and peace. Faith in God ultimately brings a return into functionality.
Re-established Deacon: Family dysfunction is a factor that is true among all walks of life in some form. Perfection does not exist within the individual, per se; therefore, within a grouping of said individuals, we cannot expect the family to perfect. Christ is perfect. The church should serve as a means of support and construction, not to deconstruct. It could provide a reference listing for community service, utilize professional/para-professional aide from willing congregants (counselors, teachers, administrators, medical, etc.), hold open forums to directly address specified concerns, or conduct an open phone, ZOOM, or TEAMS effective listening triage for consoling during a crisis. The small group experience has proven essential in meeting the needs of others during times of crisis within our church.

Pastor: It is the harmful effects of sin that bring about the avenue of dysfunction. Within the composition of the dysfunction lies the spiritual influence of negativity that enhances the willingness to embark and engage in dysfunctional behavior. Faith in Jesus Christ opens the channel of the Lord’s blessing to receive endurance in this life and all it incurs. God gives a choice to obey (John 15:1-15; and Rom 8:9-11). Within small groups, one can adopt and employ the very acts of those in biblical times and share outcomes of success and learning experiences from particular frustrations. Role-play and scenario building are exploratory and fun.

Most certainly, some responses intrigued and surprised expectations. Conversely, those expectations brought fulfillment on several fronts. There was a factor that was the most obvious, the human element and the vast differences that came into focus. The human element generally gets interrupted by sin, and the allure that plagues the curiosities of the flesh becomes a downfall. Therefore, over-trusting enables the bystander entrapment in attracting ignorance or ensnaring the dumbfounded into a life of ungodliness. The key and crux become willing to listen
effectively to what and how Lord God communicates to offset these determinants. He awaits those in whom he loves and especially those who, in turn, love him (Rom 8:27-28).

Faith is the substance of the unseen and is mandatory to have by authenticity; otherwise, it is impossible to please the Father (Heb 11:6). Humanity is a broken but prized creation of the Father that exists in a similarity of weakness. Finiteness is an excellent place because there lies a dependence in a power that can overcome any trials this world can muster (2 Cor 12:10). The following chapter will give value to how one can apply practical sensibility in family devotions and small groups in the church by incorporating tangible sets of action into daily living.

In all Practicality

Abstract concepts can be beneficial in theory, but there comes a time to put these ideas into working sets of operation. Yes, the idea is for Lord God to intervene in humankind's lives; however, he seeks to involve himself in endeavors of human effort. The Lord accentuates and advances programming when struggles occur. This brings and gives him glory and increases levels of faith. There are three ways that the family and the church can meet the struggles of societal decline. First, the family must become a family. By and through cohesive bonding, trusting, and active inclusion of a healthy prayer-life, the family, flourishes in maturity and growth. In the Old Testament, the Shema of Deut 6:6-9 illustrates itself as the fundamental basis of how a submissive and healthy family living unto the Lord can prosper. The purposeful inclusion of devotional prayer to the Hebrews were vitally important in Biblical times as Nelson shares, “The Shemá was so important to the Hebrews that they recited it when they woke up in the morning to remind them of God and how they were to conduct family life during the day. When they went to bed at night, they repeated it in order to judge how well they lived up to its
requirements. The family must commit itself unto corporate prayer, in times of need and in times of plenty, a prayer of thanksgiving is undoubtedly in order (1 Thess 5:17). The family can together come up with a familial creed or model to which to abide. Each family member could also incorporate a weekly complimentary quote to see that they could visibly include their daily operation. Prayer and fasting can benefit from timeliness and through faithfulness for spiritual cleansing and healing. Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to come and set things in order individually and collectively. In times of dire need and the desire for divine change to occur, the family's collective prayer in reciting Jabez’s blessing will usher in a difference of favor (1 Chr 4:9-10). Children mimic their parents’ operational practices and lifestyles as they govern what to do and how to be regarding themselves. Therefore, concentration on family devotions, and helping one another follow Scripture will lead to more wisdom and love being experienced in the home (Jer 29:11). Previously, in Chapter 3, family C, appendix D, exemplifies how the health of the family is benefitted by family devotion and small groups in the church. The parents were first committed among themselves and as the small children grew into teens, then adults, the same practices were employed within their own families respectively. To their credit, this did not mean that heartache, stresses, and frustrations were not experienced – they were. They state that they were more able to cope, accept, share in-depth feelings of emotion, and more able to interact with peers.

Secondly, the church, traditionally viewed as the central beacon of hope and gathering, has faced problematic community issues. Due to the strain of the pandemic, the loss of jobs and resources, families struggle with the lull of complacency and a lack that causes stress among

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104 Ibid., 17.
members. The small group ministry can address these needs by incorporating a group to conduct
job fairs on social media, provide a computer lab at the church, arrange for professionals to lend
their expertise in landing or securing specified positions, and have an extensive question and
answer session with hiring managers and human resource professionals so that all can be heard,
and skills are sharpened. The group can open with prayer and have interaction with those in need
to lead out for specified prayer needs. These interactions will enhance the faith experience as the
Spirit reveals growth and fruition are met. The resultant expectation is for healthiness and
maturity to be made and for a benefit to be experienced for all.

In times of despair and uncertainty, a reserved stance is sometimes taken by some of a
weakened countenance. Although this occurrence has taken place in some circles, those who
have not been affected but have held on to faith, also have gone through some sense of worldly
affected augmentation. Thornton shares his take, and he states, “Even church people are reticent
to speak of those private, often ecstatic, moments when they have felt themselves moved by a
force or a presence that is above and beyond themselves.”

Assurance of faith through others in
similar predicaments, with a spiritual foundation as the platform, will lead to positive dividends.
The small group endeavor can be a tool for championing individuals to Christ and solidifying
strained familial relations.

In many inner cities, the problem of homelessness and vagrants tends to become an
eyesore. The church is primed to address these sets of issues by incorporating the small group
effort to witness and evangelize individuals who have fallen on hard times. A soup kitchen or
breakfast station to offer meals and to conduct Bible studies can be used to gather information.

To become more informative to address specified needs, the group can become a detailed referral

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105 Thornton, “Raising God-Consciousness,” 75.
source to interface and address direct issues. The church benefits from outreach and membership building and those in dire need can be fed physically, mentally, emotionally, and for certain, spiritually. As family members commit themselves either directly to or in receipt of, the hope, trust, and faith components each individual possess can be greatly increased in the Holy Spirit.

The small groups’ concept is a purposed endeavor for meeting sets of issues to address families, adhere to community concerns, and expose societal lack. Openness and bias must be fundamental as not to be judgmental. As church members meet and engage others to address concerns, the main premise must be in healing and not condemnation. Lending their expertise, individual members can input into organized committees to manage specialized systems of dysfunction. The spiritual leader could appoint a chairperson to head a group that deals explicitly with crises, trauma, and grief. The committee could hold forums, interface with community resources, and other direct care by professionals in the field to help in coping with loss. A chairperson could formalize a committee to deal with suicide and school bullying. Counselors, peer mediators, and those who have experienced and overcome such atrocities could be mentors, spoke-persons, and advocates to those victimized. An additional small group could address divorce, abandonment, and negligence. The chairperson, appointed by the spiritual leader, must be attuned to the subject matter yet be grounded in Christ to stay within the framework of the church’s overall vision. These three examples of small groups within the church could be represented by each chairperson to meet with the church board and the spiritual leader to address specifics, monitor advancements, and report items and concerns of need. Beneficial aspects emerge as Knabb and Pelletier state, “Several themes permeate this growing literature base for

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lay audiences, including a biblical emphasis both on deepening relationships within small groups and on utilizing small groups to further the Kingdom of God and become more like Christ.”

Lastly, the third way the church and family could meet societal decline and struggles is to get directly involved in volunteerism. Serving an organization already established in the community that addresses a particular need will further educate, bring individual awareness, and reveal a passion for contributing in a more significant way. The church could announce a ventured endeavor for persons who meet a particular societal issue and may be experiencing or just have overcome an experience to aid others. This would infuse their passion, zeal, and increased faith level to be in more direct involvement. Additionally, appointed professional members could conduct a one-on-one triage of need for members of known struggle and offer an avenue of hope for others unwilling to step forward.

A church member, who happens to be dealing with familial dysfunction that involves displacement or birthrights, could volunteer for an orphanage. If the same issue currently serves as a challenge, then maybe the answer lies within the framework of what may be already working. Ties could be established through a family recovery-based effort that has similarities to the current stance of personal situation. The establishment would be a better link if the organization were Christian-based. Prayer is always in order, and by acknowledging the Father, he assures direction to your pathway (Prov 3:5-6). To deter dysfunctional behavior within the family, concentration on in-home devotions amid a detailed prayer life promotes health to a degree of notice among participants. Another means to cope with life issues is to embrace and learn about the culprit that brought the loss. The small group benefits its member directly through the aforementioned devotionals and prayer recognition by allowing them to share

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concerns and to learn how to cope and accept things as they arise. The group itself benefits by being an asset of resolve and an outreach for interpersonal referencing. Personal experiences in the Lord bringing fruition in the lives of the small group members disclose a relational aspect unto those who thirst for Christ. These infusions accentuate health and instill trust in a faith that can bring about a change for the better, thereby strengthening the family relationships from the outside in. In a scenario of an individual who has lost a loved one to heart disease, they could benefit by helping others and themselves by joining the American Heart Association. This union would boost the organization, help soothe the family’s and individual’s tension directly affected, and ultimately strengthen faith by involvement. Outreach along these lines, through the small group endeavor, offers evangelistic opportunities in witnessing for Christ. He must be lifted so others can see his overcoming within themselves (John 16:33); by planting his seeds, he then nurtures and waters for growth and maturity (1 Cor 3:7). Winning the lost to Christ is the crux of the Christian believer. The small group ministry directly touches specific needs for personal benefit and brings awareness to the loss of what is missing spiritually. The Holy Spirit infuses health and promotes goodness. The encouragement of the church after initiation of the small group evangelistic effort can solidify its involvement by recognition of participants and bringing notice to the families committed to the project. This will bring rise to the awareness of increased health among family members. It is in his intervention that the one who presents Christ and even more to the one who receives him, that maturity and increase can be experienced and shared.

The family devotions avenue targets the individual family member in their faith-walk in Christ; simultaneously, the crux of the family unit gleans from and adapts in the sharing of interactive blessing. Family B, in appendix D, benefitted greatly from the mother/wife’s divine directive to move to the United States. The initiative to activate a social media church ministry
when the proposition was otherwise absurd in the pre-COVID era, turned out to be just what was needed to remain safe. Being a family from Central America and not knowing anyone in the states, pressed the notion of togetherness within the household, and family devotions carried deep significance. The ability to devote much attention to prayer amongst themselves enabled family members to branch out in outreach efforts to communicate with others. Accents in language, expression of differing culture, and being newly acclimated to the States served as avenues for open discussions that ultimately led to the commonality of Christ Jesus as Savior. Their ministry thrived as the devotions in the Holy Spirit confirmed connectivity with others.

The small group endeavor in the church showed much promise as a catalyst for change and by invitation, an acceptance of what Lord God is doing in the lives of humankind. It brought about a sense of empathy in the time of someone else’s crisis and offered intervention strategies that were infused by the Holy Spirit. The small church that instituted the Committee for Concerned Christians earmarked persons in need within the community. The church itself by referencing needs of service, offering spiritual counseling, and spearheading fundraising ventures to aid in monetary relief, including food and shelter helped the community and benefitted the church to gain and retain members. What a benefit for all involved, especially those victimized or otherwise affected by grief. The small groups brought a feeling of belonging, warmth, promotion of health, acceptability, and more importantly a detailed recognition in the will of the Father.

Being involved in volunteerism enables one to focus and to peer into differing sets of perspectives with dealing with and accepting crises of change. Life’s dictates require much within the lives of others that ultimately affect the collective, even indirectly. Loss can be devastating and personally challenging, especially when reminders trigger the emotions of regret,
fault placement, and blame. However, when one can seek out a purposeful cause to comfort those in similar sets of circumstances and share stories of relational interaction, then the seeking of peace, solace, and acceptance can begin. Volunteerism in this manner leaves little room for self-pity and offers a pathway to what Lord God ultimately has in store (Jer 29:11). The resultant research clearly shows that a commitment to these three ways of promotion in family health through in-home family devotions, small groups within the church, and direct involvement in specified volunteerism bring fulfillment into the family and the church—this glorifies the Father and instills his reverence.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: Moral Ethics of Family Value

Where should exploratory research go from here? The relational dynamics of the family need to be studied from the standpoint of obedience and a willingness to adhere to God’s word and will. Delving further in devotional in-home activities can only benefit and draw the family closer to health. Prayers, discussions, Bible studies, and family retreats could solidify and bring greater cohesion among members. Determining an understanding by defining righteousness and normality is discretionary at best. A standard must be sought to place reliance. Lord God is unchanging love; therefore, he stands to be the most robust and obvious choice to place personal and familial dependence. Lord God places much value in the family, eradicating separations and instilling unity in his accordance (Eph 3:14-15). Children benefit from healthy families to face the world and give themselves wholeheartedly unto Christ. Therefore, the parents are critical players in the family setting because the husband and wife can nurture, teach, and edify one another in Christ Jesus as they learn, pray, meditate, and consume scripture in togetherness (Matt 18:20). As parents become enmeshed in the word of God, they can live it and relate it to their children. Nelson shares his view as he states, “Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. This is an excellent wording of the teaching/learning process. It requires that parents be serious about their understanding of God as they endeavor to interpret God to their children.”

All families will have issues of concern; however, the pristine state of healthiness allows for peace, harmony, and resolve. The presence of sin makes sure that there is an interruption of said peace that distracts and causes selfishness and arrogance between members. Hence, a

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detailed prayer life is essential and becomes more evident as life is lived (1 Thess 5:17-19).

Faithfulness is a must as it pleases the Father (Heb 11:6). Falwell looks at the relational aspect of faith in prayer; he states, “When you talk to God at every available opportunity, this is the prayer of communion. . . . This conversational style of praying can revolutionize your prayer life.”

As the individual or the couple, not necessarily the parent or parents, come to this juncture in their spiritual journey, they become mature enough to introduce other members into a productive lifestyle of prayer. Ps 55:22 gives detailed direction when one comes overwhelmingly constrained; it tells of casting all burdens upon him that he may endure them in our stead, thereby lightening our yoke for peace and restoration. Family devotions and small groups within the church allow for interaction between members in how experiences are received and to touch upon the reactions of others. Small groups bring the benefit of understanding and a yearning for more to share.

Perception of the Church

The Church, a fellowship of like-minded individuals in Christ, serves as an anticipated hope for some and a reminder of disappointment to others. The definition of variance is the fact or quality that rests in a difference. Although the healthy church should have Christ at the forefront of all operations, the organism itself contains broken persons in a broken world. Opportunity for the missing of the mark in Christ still occurs by giving in to temptation as the mandates of life encourage sinfulness and hurry lifestyle along. The incorporation of small groups into the church can focus and pinpoint specified topics of issue that have brought challenges into the lives of individuals. Knabb and Pelletier speak about the co-relational aspects of small groups, “From a theoretical perspective, because of both the relational and spiritual

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109 Falwell, Building Dynamic Faith, 46.
focus of small groups—meeting weekly to pray together, to study scripture together, to gain self-awareness and insight into unhelpful behavioral patterns, and to support and encourage one another to reduce judgment and shame—church-based groups might help Christian adults to develop and maintain healthy relationships with both others and God, in addition to cultivating faith maturity and Christian orthodoxy.” More research on how churches can structure themselves to be small group-oriented and how these groups can aim to bring detailed increases to families can prove very beneficial to churches’ effectiveness.

The questionnaire in appendix A produced results that bear recognition regarding how effective small groups within the church and family devotion at home can become. Two questions scored high, but not the highest. However, they were significant enough to show importance in how through willingness, these attributes can bring benefit within the home and the church. Question 2 in section 5, Sin: the causality of Dysfunctional Behavior, yielded an overall score of 4.5, meaning that there was a strong acknowledgment of the destructive aspect of sin and that the solution only lies in Christ. The small group endeavor in the church accentuates healing and exalts the teachings of Christ to the benefit of healthy families. Question 5 in section 6, The Role of the Church produced a similar score of 4.1, indicating that about the issues of concern, that church administrators are open to directly addressing particular family, community, and individual needs regarding attention. This is comparable to Donahue and Gowler’s assessment of healthiness in the family and the church in how small groups stimulate growth and spiritual increase. Participants felt a closeness in the presence of God and reacted to church leadership as more direct attention was given to personal and relatable concerns. The formation of the small groups in the local church can directly pinpoint needs and tackle the overt

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problems as they arise. These are credits in how the local church promotes family health. Believers and followers in Christ must be able to share and give a good account of their faithfulness and trustworthiness in the Lord that proves to be nurturing and illuminating in the sternness of assurance (1 Pet 3:15).

The small group church endeavor could be formed to address glaring worldview topics that are well represented contemporarily. These topics can be tackled by the small group to accentuate ways in how grace, faith, and trust in the Lord can overcome the ills of the world. The world’s view to combating one such topic as chemical dependency looks at doing better to stay away from persons, places, and triggers that may cause an unwanted action. The small group concept looks at ways to link up with others in similar situations and to talk, share, cry, and allow for others who have overcome to add their experiences. Counseling, prayer, education, and awareness are key components to alleviate denial. Allowing thought processes to be aligned in the harmonious and perfect will of God in Lord Jesus (Phil 2:5) sets up his glory and his presence to be made known among men. Further research can produce more beneficial ways churches practicing small groups can strengthen families and particularly in how they can be helping family relations.

Embattlement by Faith

Allowing Lord God to take the lead in the lives of those that have a belief in him is a guarantee of deliverance. Hence, the most complex set of dysfunctional behavior is no match for Lord God to resolve. Dysfunctional activity in the family setting results from a fallen generation from a past that has filtered down and will continue until the return of Lord Jesus. Small groups can accentuate these facets to embark upon faith recognition and for fruition to be noticed when set issues are lessened or eradicated. Listening to fellow small group members in how they were
able to overcome their situation and to see others outside the church meet their concerns through the group can inspire and bring hope to the individual group member in need.

Further research can instill empowerment and acceptance of the individual to immerse oneself in the Holy Spirit. These experiences bring awareness of joy and show how the Lord works in others’ lives. Realism in personal journeyed activity then becomes more interactive, attractive, and enhanced. The symbolism of the church rooted in Christ Jesus becomes the direct image of worldview defiance and things that are morally wrong devoid of Christlikeness.\textsuperscript{111} Living a life into Jesus Christ, our risen Savior affords believers to experience his abundance. Freedom and joy can be discovered right now in the contentment of Christ.\textsuperscript{112} This relationship will melt away any degree of dysfunctional operation within any genre, as recognition in the small group experience is discovered.

Against the Grain of Normalcy

There must be a willingness to be and to do well in life concerning a self-anchored position in Christ. Meaning as one commits to the will of God, then awareness and spiritual discernment becomes more readily available in church group enterprises. Participation yields needed benefit as personal issues are resolved and the ability to aid others presents themselves. Woe is the crux of a dysfunctional life; sin means to degenerate health and that by which has been constructed. It robs and deteriorates the family structure from within as members try to maintain, help, and in some cases, cover up the stain that is so apparent to others. Nelson reveals the subtleties of sin in dysfunctional families in how change can be instilled through parental influence. She states, “The child—who yearns most appropriately to be loved and accepted for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] Smith, “A Word from…,” 102.
\item[112] Ortberg, Me I Want to Be, 35.
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who she or he is, and who is dependent upon the parent to mirror back feelings, thus teaching the child who he or she is—learns instead to be the “gifted” child that the parent wants or approves of and to deny those parts of self that are feared to be unacceptable. Those unacceptable parts are choreographed into a dance of acceptability—a dance designed to woo a parent the love that should be a child’s natural birthright. Children raised in this dysfunctional way learn then to live out this drama of alienation in their relationships with others who might give them the love they never fully received.∗∗13 A life devoted to godliness through family devotions augments this behavior to the contrary. Parenting exercises and character building within the small groups at church support the validity of a healthy relationship in home life. Through biblical discussions and key character awareness, the small group could bring out how family situations were handled and how contextually not much is changed. This acknowledgment in the small group carries a great dividend. The design of the small group can be flexible to address certain and specified complexities of issues, such as internal dysfunction by utilizing counseling techniques and activities. The small group experience would be well suited to address and pinpoint such concerns. Getting involved in small groupings at church that specifically address the needs of people and the community can jumpstart a passion to become better. An avenue to reconstruction in the personal network of trust and the strengthening of family bonds becomes the product of the small group experience. In the process of healing, the starting point must be within; then, within the inner circle of the family rippling outward toward those outside the family.

The biggest finding that was learned from this project was that an epiphany of awareness was realized among participants. Many were awe-struck in how hidden precepts within themselves were realized and utterly surprised when the small group experience modeled their

familial situations. The reflection of what should be and what must be appeared more evident. Many noticed that the small group meant change must occur in their personal and familial situations. The proverbial light bulb illuminated to the forefront. The family must be a cohesive unit of one, working into efficacy. Pipes and Lee share their interpretation, “Healthy families spend quantity and quality time around God’s purposes.” Qualitative research is a descriptive analysis of certain operational events that occur within the lives of people willing to share their insights.

Section 4 of appendix A, the fidelity-focused questionnaire, generally took the working aspect of faith and exposed it. There cannot be just faith without work nor work outside faith when serving the Lord. This section scored slightly higher than the previous, due to the exercising of faith and the resultant aspect it yields. A score of 4.03 was tabulated. The working out of your faith is beneficial for growth, lest it becomes stagnant and fruitless (Jas 2:26). This section focused on the topic of doctrine and the awareness of, being reflective of the Lord in daily living, and the commitment to doing good as a result of a known belief in salvation. The score does indicate that strong acknowledgment exists collectively; however, individually, much room for improvement is needed and can be achieved in small groups at church. The local church could benefit immensely by pinpointing the individual need for growth, by addressing more research topics to advance members’ perception of faith and their role in attaining it in Christ. This benefit would be ideal for the non-churched believer to find inclusivity.

Section 5 addressed dysfunctional behavior in the analysis of sin in how it deems itself as the causal culprit. The expectation of this section was thought to be the highest of the six due to

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114 Pipes and Lee, “*Family to Family*”, 69.

115 Swinton and Mowat, “*Practical Theology*”, 43.
relatability in sinfulness (Rom 3:23). The finding did not disappoint as this section scored the highest of the six with a score of 4.47. Church involvement stimulates growth in health regarding the family. It also serves as a benefit in promoting family devotions at home and in conjunction with the small group endeavor, it can aid the formation of awareness in the Father’s processes. Family C, in chapter 3, depicts the aforementioned well as by family devotions led by the parents, the children were privy to participate in small groups at church, which in turn, allowed them to teach their children. The teenager within the interview portion speaks with purpose and zeal resultant from family devotions at home and through small groups at church. It is the Lord that ultimately brings about change; however, believers can be positioned to be utilized of him to help those in most need.

Section 6 focused on family views, the role of the church, and how perceptions of its operations stand out in the community. This section scored the second-lowest of measurable outcomes with an average of 3.82. It indicated that the perspective role in the church is discretionary to the degree of personal need and spiritual maturation versus the willingness to commit to witnessing, evangelizing, and exercising a faith-level becoming of Jesus Christ. Nuances of Christian growth must be exercised daily just as your faith and the work that accentuates it. The church is an avenue of spiritual maturation in the exercising of individual and collective faith, thus strengthening bonds and a walk in the Lord. Further research in small groups could pinpoint an evangelistic witnessing component in the form of outreach. Certain areas in the community could be targeted and recognized as focal points of need. The church, in turn, would bring awareness and introduction through invitation and fellowship. Thereby enhancing the affected families and bringing increase to the families of the small group. Spiritual intervention occurs from personal, familial, collaborative, community, national, and worldwide
arenas. His intervention brings unity, togetherness, and connectivity to Lord God. Keller states, “The Spirit equips every believer to be a prophet who brings the truth, a priest who sympathetically serves, and a king who calls others into accountable love.”116

Question 3 of appendix C, the interview, alluded to the fact of the church being used to combat specific issues of need. Through programmatic ventures such as small groups, this will help accentuate, educate, and make aware individuals who may be suffering due to dysfunctional behavior. The church’s small groups could prove to be an added benefit. Faith in God thwarts the drive to indulge in sinfulness due to a sinful nature. The viewpoint of the re-introduced deacon depicts the church constructively and not to a detriment. The church must not aid in the destruction of the character, integrity, or personality of its members or those in need who are not. Dysfunction is real and factual; no one is immune from it nor perfected by it. Further research could be used to form prayer groups within the small group who go out to pray for persons in need or to highlight certain individuals and situations in particular need of prayer. To the person in need of prayer, a sense of warmth and belonging will surface, while members of the group will experience spiritual involvement thereby positively affecting their own family. Dysfunctional behavior destroys what has been brought together and does not build or rebuild in conformity. Therefore, the church should exercise its dependence on God through prayer and utilize its spiritual authority in Christ Jesus to be infused by his Holy Spirit.

A Hope for Tomorrow

Christ illuminates hope to bring resolve and fruition to an otherwise darkened and dismal situation. The world brims with so much hate, rudeness, arrogance, pride, and malice with ill-regard to life. Salvation is sorely needed; however, sin blinds and shrouds cognition that

116 Keller, *Center Church*, 346.
importance utterly focuses on vain-glorious enterprises. Therefore, those oblivious to the allure of sin do not know that danger befalls them. Willingness to commune with the Holy Spirit internally would bring acknowledgment for divine change to occur. The Gospel of Christ teaches meekness and relenting into the will of God as he opens doors and makes provision (Ps 55:22). Why not try Him?

The people’s perishing rests in denying the truth and the unwillingness to seek it out in Christ (Hos 4:6). Hence, a person must get to the point that they cannot progress effectively, healthy, and harmoniously unless a commitment to Christ is understood and applied by the Holy Spirit. Then teaching unto those closest by proximity can be initiated. Spiritual intimacy, according to Clinton and Trent, is a commitment to growing in the Spirit by and through faith. Willingness in embracing divine transformation enables one to fully ascertain spiritual vision to grasp change. Exercises and group Bible study within the small group in the church can bring out awareness in divine intervention, thereby stimulating individual growth in faithfulness.

Christian counseling bridges the practicality of secular counseling techniques and interventions, which salvages the client’s Christian welfare unto reintroduction. It offers an immersion into a biblical principle that the severance of sin and dysfunctional behavior has brought into an ordained lifestyle. This type of counseling is but one of many ways to initiate the healing process. It is hard to commit to and rely upon another to address personal issues; however, if the intrusion brings awareness in a loving, caring, and nurturing way, hopefully, acceptance and cooperation surface. Mending the broken chain of trust is a delicate process that must be inclusive of divine intervention. The inclusion of the small group through family

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117 Clinton and Trent, “Marriage and Family Counseling”, 282.

devotions can augment stressors in the release of strain and pressure that has been built up in the sharing aspects of members and through others’ sets of the issue being addressed. Further research could expound upon the avenues of addressing individuals in times of crisis, grief, and traumatic experiences to bridge a more spiritual understanding during their plight. It is in the Holy Spirit’s conviction as he gives understanding and inspiration to grasp the significance of God’s Word. Under his auspice, the healthy church provides a haven of teaching, learning, and applying the Word of God into the brokenness of life.

In the research tool used, the questionnaire, appendix A, addressed the importance of prayer within the healthy family through devotions, and based on responses, a yield of prosperity arose. One question addressed Lord God’s holiness and how a life reflecting this holiness leads to beneficial return. Another question looked directly at prayer for one another and self during stressful times. Lastly, prayer was brought forth in the unity of togetherness by recognizing Christian doctrine (Prov 27:17). Therefore, there is no time when prayer is not warranted (1 Thess 5:17). The families with higher scores relating to a healthy prayer life were those of a healthy countenance. Families B-E in chapter 4, appendix D, through their determined family devotions and small group involvement in church, yielded higher representation due to a relational acknowledgment and closeness in Christ. The outcomes of their statements were positive and growth-oriented as a result. Prayer is essential and fundamental to life in healthy relations. Family in-home devotions can only strengthen and solidify bonds while simultaneously drawing closer in faith unto the Father. Enns shows that prayer is the avenue of communication with an involved God with his creation. He states, “Although God is entirely distinct from His creation, this does not mean He is inaccessible or uninvolved in His creation. Throughout

Scripture, God is seen in His immanence in ministering to His people and dealing with unbelievers.\textsuperscript{120} The local church that best demonstrates the severity of health in the privileged gift of prayer is the one that emphasizes the various forms and purpose of types of prayer in Communion: continual, Supplication: need, Intercession: others, Spiritual Warfare: repentance/forgiveness, Agreement: corporate, Awareness: watchfulness, and Thanksgiving: divine recognition. The committed and healthy family must be reflective of a divinely led family. Further research in the positive promotion of detailed prayer life, encouraged through and facilitated by the church, would prove to be a wealth of research opportunity. Duval and Hays state, “There is really no substitute for prayer when reading, interpreting, and applying the Bible. Communing with the divine Author through prayer can only help us understand what he is saying to us through his Word.”\textsuperscript{121}

As an illustration of the above, one church is led unto committal to address a dire need in stressful times. A small church in Central Texas has initiated an ad-hoc committee called “The Committee of Concerned Christians.” They function to address the dire need of persons/families affected by trauma and experiencing grief. Linking families to community resources, filling in the gaps of need, and providing a sense of hope, encouragement, and neighborly love shows the ways of Christ. This small church has implemented the small group endeavor to address grief and trauma in times of crisis. This system of support can be for the congregants; more importantly, it must be available for the community-at-large. The spiritual leader or the assigned individual taking calls for the church must determine if a situation warrants a crisis, whether immediate attention is needed or if the next church service would suffice. Wright suggests

\textsuperscript{120} Enns, \textit{The Moody Handbook}, 195.

\textsuperscript{121} Duval and Hays, \textit{Grasping God’s Word}, 231-32.
making the correct assessment could be dependent on future relations; he states, “If you are
going to have an effect upon the life of a person or family, it would be in the time of crisis.”122 The church could fill this niche.

For centuries, the church has been the epicenter for hope, solution, and a meeting place for the togetherness of individuals who lean and depend on Lord Jesus for comfort. Martin Luther, in the 1500s in Germany, was the pioneer of the Reformation, a return to Christian doctrine. He spearheaded a movement for the church to re-establish its basis in Scripture.123 The church that actively involves itself in small group initiatives to focus on pre-determined societal issues can significantly benefit the families directly affected, who are also members. Knabb and Pellitier share their thoughts on small groups; they state, “Finally, the authors described several theoretical benefits of Christian small groups, including (a) cultivating an awareness that being connected and needing others is a strength, (b) viewing stressors as less overwhelming, (c) increasing authentic self-awareness and self-expression, and (d) ameliorating self-judgment and shame.”124 The concerned encouragement and counseling which come from fellow Christians in small group experiences bring about healing. This divinely led practice of the church corporately will indirectly assimilate the same into the congregant individually. This method of modeling and educating with God’s Word engrains a sense of passion and staunch dedication into the children of healthy church-based families (Prov 22:6). Nelson shares his notion of Christian modeling; he states, “The practical way to inculcate the grace of giving is for parents to model acts of giving and to mentor their children’s efforts to do likewise. The model part is to give


123 Lane, A Concise History, 148.

124 Lane, A Concise History, 344.
regularly to your church and to explain what you are doing and why.” Hence, the small group effort carries many benefits for the church and for those who come into contact with the church. Members experience growth when they participate in group initiatives especially those individuals committing to family devotions at home. These measurable occurrences mend ties through fidelity in the family, accentuate the will of God, and offer hope amid dysfunctional behavior supported by a healthy church body.

Going Beyond

This study illustrates by the findings rendered that faith exercised in the assurance of the Lord and a determined walk in Christ in his Holy Spirit is a must. Representation is not to say that trouble will elude the believer. Still, it does indicate that the Lord will be in the midst of the crisis (Heb 13:5), provides comfort by stability, and reveal a pathway toward resolve (1 Cor 10:13). The small group endeavor has brought out these facts within participants and positive benefit has ensued to enable acceptance and avenues of coping. Kirkpatrick shares how the small group builds community in bringing benefit to individuals, their families, and the local church itself. Within a medium-size northwestern Presbyterian church, he spoke of Kyle’s story as he was broken, but reinvigorated due to the small group at his church. Kyle experienced a mental illness due to the stress of divorce and bankruptcy. After joining his church’s small group, he did not feel alone nor alienated, but welcomed, warmed, and invited to the point of relief that he was not alone. He noticed improvements in his life due to the distinct prayers and purposed supplications on his behalf. He soon was introduced to gifts within himself he had no previous knowledge of for ministry, to which he later became a church officer. Just as Kyle was able to

find the benefit of resolve and rejuvenation through the small group, this study did find comfort among its participants. Notably in family F in Chapter 4, appendix D, as growth was experienced, belonging was felt, and awareness of security was noticed. Issues were more prevalent and dealt with in faith and love as opposed to blaming and guilt.

Without faith it is impossible to please God; therefore, an acknowledgment in him brings a fulfillment that he can. His institutions of family, government, and church are no different. This imperative of faithfulness gives to the operation in Christ to find a peaceable journey into his prosperity. The family will operate more efficiently, spiritual vision and discernment will become more readily available, and the acceptance of and practice in patience becomes more aware and applicable. Lord God gives the resources to overcome obstacles and to endure the strains that life tends to pose. The church is an organism of structured believers coming together in Christlikeness to lift Jesus, glorify the Father, and lead to loss to the Lord’s salvation.

Dysfunctional behavior is real and is experienced within all walks of life because sin is so rampant. Therefore, a relationship in Christ is warranted to reach salvation and receive the specified blessings of the Father. Faithfulness moves the Holy Spirit, enabling the believer unto maturity to elevate in Christ. Family devotions in the home give much credence to healthiness. In his presence, one can observe the inner workings of his grace. An alignment of will, lifestyle, and practical application of godly principles must occur and develop within the scope of vision. Expressing the importance of faith and how a life in Christ leads to his abundance, Stanley shares his take, “Spiritually speaking, faith is confidence that God is who he says he is and that he will do what he has promised to do. . . . Pursuing a divine vision is an act of worship. It is a
declaration of our confidence in God.” There is a great benefit in the abidance of Christ that promotes connectivity in the Lord, his perfect plan unfolds and is brought to awareness.

Transformation of the faithful family starts individually, then unto each member until the unit congeals into oneness in Christ. Yes, change starts within as the ripping effect is realized and others start to accept this change as their own. The small group endeavor within the church, in-home devotions, and community involvement accentuates these points of discovery which, in turn, yields a faithful and healthy increase.

---

Bibliography


Appendix A:

**FIDELITY-FOCUSED ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questionnaire structural format was taken from Gene A. Getz, *The Measure of a Healthy Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 188–197.

Focus Section 1: God’s Formation of Family

**Principle 1**—When recognizing specific diligence in divine intervention one must be aware of who is at work.

Question: To what extent do you know beyond any doubt that God is Lord and faith in Christ is the pathway to salvation?

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**Principle 2**—When measuring faith in the Lord it must be applied through action and not just knowledge.

Question: To what extent do you feel that exercising your faith involves action regarding the relationships among your family members?

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**Principle 3**—When considering your faith a thorough and devout commitment must be given unto the Lord.

Question: To what extent do you understand true disciples of Jesus are committed to obeying everything He has taught us?

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**Principle 4**—The commandments of Christ dictate a love of the Father first then unto our fellow neighbors.

Question: To what extent do your family members function as loving and caring brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ toward one another (Matthew 22:37-40)?

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**Principle 5**—When measuring formation, we must evaluate the degree to which family members are reflecting the fruit of the Spirit in their relationships with one another.
Question: To what extent are members of your family reflecting the fruit of the Spirit in their relationships with one another—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23)?

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Focus Section 2: Acknowledgement of and Personal Identity in Christ

**Principle 1**—When considering faithfulness, we must look for the degree to which believers and non-believers have a true understanding of who the Lord Jesus Christ is to them.

Question: To what extent do the members of your family understand and believe in the deity of Jesus Christ—that He and the Father are One?

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**Principle 2**—When measuring family faithfulness, we must evaluate the degree to which all members of that family reflect the life and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question: To what extent do the members in your family measure up to the fullness of Christ as a unit, reflecting His character?

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Focus Section 3: Reflecting God’s Grace in the Fulfillment of Faith

Principle 1—There must be an understanding that salvation is a gift that results from God’s grace—a gift that cannot be earned and that is eternal.

Question: To what extent do the members of your family understand and believe that salvation is an absolute gift and cannot be earned by good works?

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Principle 2—There has to be an understanding that Christ died for all our sins to offer salvation in substitution for condemnation. He is the Savior of the world.

Question: To what extent are your family members motivated to present their bodies to Jesus Christ as living sacrifices because of God’s great mercy in saving them (Romans 12:1-2)?

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Principle 3—When measuring family health in the divine sense, we must determine the degree to which members have a correct view of God’s holiness.

Question: To what extent are the people in your family committed to being holy as God is holy?

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Principle 4—When measuring the dynamics of the family faith, we must determine the degree to which members understand God’s loving discipline, both directly and, when necessary, through the local body of Christ.

Question: To what extent do the members of your family understand that God will discipline His children at some point in time if they persist in living outside of His will?

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Principle 5—When measuring the family, we must determine the degree to which its members are extending grace to one another.
Question: To what extent do the members of your family avoid judgmental attitudes and accept one another just as Christ has accepted them?

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**Principle 6**—When measuring the faith of a family, we must determine the degree to which members are drawing on God’s grace to carry out His divine directives.

Question: To what extent do the people in our family pray for one another—and themselves—when facing difficult circumstances?

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Focus Section 4: Faith that Works

**Principle 1**—When measuring family cohesiveness, we must determine the degree to which doctrinal stability exists in that local community of faith.

Questions: To what extent do the members of your family understand and believe the basic doctrines of Christianity in the sense of togetherness (Proverbs 27:17, )?

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**Principle 2**—When measuring family commitment in faithfulness, we must determine the degree to which members of faith demonstrate that they are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
Question: To what extent are the members of your family committed to doing good works because of their salvation?

Little 2 Some 3 Much 4

Principle 3—When measuring family formation, we must determine the degree to which members are praying that Christ’s life will be developed within them (John 15:7, ).

Question: To what extent are the people in your family praying that they will reflect the love and holiness of God Himself?

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Focus Section 5: Sin, the Causality of Dysfunction

Principle 1—When measuring family faithfulness, we must look for a biblical understanding of hope that is based on the belief in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Question: To what extent do the people in your family believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and that He is able (Matthew 28:18)?

Little 2 Some 3 Much 4

Principle 2—When measuring a faith level in the family, we must know that sin is real and has desires for us (Genesis 4:7, ). Through the Lord Jesus Christ, all may have eternal life regardless of their past by forgiveness.

Question: To what extent do the members of your family have in the recognition that sin plants seeds of destruction in dysfunctional behavior, but Christ comes to offer freedom (John 3:17, )?
Principle 3—When measuring the family in faith, we must look for a biblical understanding of hope that reflects steadfastness and endurance no matter life’s circumstances.

Question: To what extent do the people in your family reflect a sense of security and stability regardless of the dysfunction by behavior that may befall them?

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Focus Section 6: The Role of the Church

Principle 1—When measuring the faithfulness of the family, we must look at the degree to which members are personally devoting themselves to learning and applying the Word of God in their lives.

Question: To what extent are the members of your family being exposed to the total message of the Bible through study, worship, teaching, and preaching?

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Principle 2—When measuring family formation, we must look at the degree to which members are regularly experiencing fellowship with God and one another in the church.

Question: To what extent are the members in your family experiencing true fellowship with God and with one another in an integrated way through the mission of the church?

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Principle 3—When measuring family faithfulness, we must look at the degree to which their church is impacting the world and seeing people put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Question: To what extent are the members of your family reflecting love and unity to the world around them?

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Principle 4—When measuring the family, we must look at the degree to which dependence is placed in the faithfulness of God as remedy and Savior from the plight of the world.

Question: To what extent are your family members being committed to the will of God through obedience and trust to combat the noticeable dysfunctional behavior?

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Principle 5—When measuring family faithfulness, we must look at the operation of the church and how it defends, complements, and accentuate faithful prayer.

Question: To what extent are the leaders of the church free to develop strategies in prayer to specifically address dysfunctional behavior?

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Appendix B:
Survey Supplemental

SUPPLEMENTAL (please circle one)

1. Do you regularly attend church on Sundays and/or inclusive of weekly meetings?
   
   YES          NO

2. Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?
   
   YES          NO

3. Have you experienced or a part of dysfunctional behavior within a family setting?
   (ie. Divorce, Drug/Alcohol Abuse, Suicide, Physical Abuse, Bullying, Etc.)
   
   YES          NO

4. Do you believe that the operation of a church can aid in faithfulness and increase belief?
   
   YES          NO
Appendix C:

Interview

1. Discuss your assured knowledge regarding faith and how Lord God requires it within the composition of his established sets of institutions, i.e. Government (Authority), Family (Marriage), and the Church.

2. The construction and formation of marriage were done in the Garden of Eden; however, resulting from the disobedient act, the family thereunto was formed. Elaborate how you feel and come to believe that the structural integrity of the healthy family is of divine influence.

3. The church is not a building constructed with brick and mortar but a fellowship of like-minded believers in Christ (Proverbs 27:17, ). To bring awareness and combat sin how do you view the church as a tool of Christ to exalt the Father and to address the iniquities of the world?

4. Sin is very real and the dirge of humanity as it runs rampant disrupting and creating chaos by temptation with the allure of fanciful pleasures (1 John 2:16, ). Do you believe dysfunctional behavior within the family to be the result of such activity? How can faith offset these atrocities?
Appendix D:
Family Focus Topic

This particular section delves into the family structure regarding the way worship and praise are conducted between one another at home and in how small groups within the church operation have become a benefit. Six families were asked two questions before the methodology inclusion. The two questions proposed are as follows:

1) Have you committed to family devotions (either 1 on 1, as a couple, or as a family), such as specific prayers, meditations, or in song – how has this impacted the health of your home life?

2) Have you participated in small groups at your church, if so, in what ways has your involvement affected the home life?
Appendix E:

Institutional Review Board – Approval Letter

Dear Terrence Toliver,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to this approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

- Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

- Your study involves surveying or interviewing minors, or it involves observing the public behavior of minors, and you will participate in the activities being observed.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
Appendix F:

Research Flyer

COME AND TAKE

NOTICE!

Are you looking to resolve unanswered questions?

Curb your curiosity!

Come take part of a doctoral research design. Take a thorough and detailed questionnaire/survey (20-30 minutes).

Be interviewed on specific topics of issue that plague society (15-25 minutes).

WHEN: Saturday, July 11, 2020, at 1:00 pm
WHERE: VINEYARD, 2505 Washington Ave.Ste. 8
WHY: To complete research for a doctorate dissertation
What’s in it for participants? Drawing for $100 Gift Card
Need not be present to win

CONTACT: Rev. Terrence Toliver