

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Applying Hope: A Preparatory Course for Lay Pastoral Counseling

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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Lynchburg, Virginia

August 2020

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, June 20th, 2021

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This thesis project is a study on equipping laypeople at C3 Denton in basic pastoral counseling skills. The purpose of this project is to develop and implement a six-week course in lay pastoral counseling that will enable its participants to provide pastoral counseling services to fellow congregants with minor pastoral counseling needs. C3 Denton is a church located in Denton, a rapidly growing city with two universities. Reaching emotionally wounded individuals has been a consistent focus of C3 Denton since it was founded, which lead to a strong need for pastoral counseling services for its congregants. The goal of this thesis project is to equip a group of faithful congregants with basic pastoral counseling skills so that they can assist the pastoral staff in meeting this need for pastoral counseling. This project will involve pre-class interviews to determine the eligibility of its participants, and post-class interviews to determine the success of this project. While this project will only serve to equip its participants to provide lay pastoral counseling services, it may serve as a starting point for the development of a lay counseling ministry at C3 Denton, as well as serving as a framework for other like-minded churches to prepare their congregants to provide lay pastoral counseling services.

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Abbreviations

C3 Denton	<i>Christ Community Church, Denton</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the unique aspects of Christianity is the call for believers to care for fellow believers. Galatians 6:2 explains this call by saying that Christians should “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Caring for fellow believers who are burdened is an urgent task, and the burdens that Christians carry can be varied. Vanhoye explains that the burdens that Christians should bear are “all the hardships that arise in life: exhausting work, sickness and physical pain, psychological suffering, loneliness, strife, [and] failure,”¹ of brothers and sisters in Christ. When Christians walk alongside of other Christians who are struggling with hardships like these, their burden becomes easier to bear, the joy of those walking together is increased, and Christ is glorified.

One of the primary ways that this happens is through pastoral counseling, which is a necessary ministry of the church. Maynard and Snodgrass point out that in pastoral counseling, wisdom is applied to the difficult situations that the struggling individual is going through.² When wisdom is applied by the pastoral counselor in an appropriate manner, the individual who is struggling gains a better perspective on their difficulties, which makes their burden easier to carry. Of course, applying wisdom in an appropriate manner is a skill that requires training. While formal training in pastoral counseling is often only available through graduate education, basic training in this skill can be provided to lay congregants through well-developed programs. In order to develop pastoral counseling skills among the congregants of C3 Denton, this thesis

¹ Albert Vanhoye *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

² Elizabeth A. Maynard and Jill Lynnae Snodgrass, *Understanding Pastoral Counseling* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2015), 6.

sought to develop and provide a helpful six-week pastoral counseling training program for lay congregants at C3 Denton so that they can provide pastoral counseling for congregants struggling with minor issues, which will relieve some of the burden of pastoral counseling off of the pastoral staff and elder team.

Ministry Context

Denton, Texas is a rapidly growing city in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Founded in 1857 as the seat of Denton County, the City of Denton's initial growth was due to it being a center for agricultural manufacturing and trade. Within fifty years of its founding, Denton also became home to two major universities: North Texas Normal College (later renamed University of North Texas or UNT), and Girls' Industrial College (later renamed Texas Women's University or TWU).³ Partially due to these two universities, Denton has historically experienced notable population growth. For instance, between 1960 and 1980, Denton grew from 26,844 residents to 48,063.⁴ According to the US Census, Denton grew from 116,326 residents in 2010 to 141,541 residents in 2019.⁵ The Texas Comptroller points out that Denton's growth from 2010-2017 outpaced all other regions of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.⁶ All of this population growth has helped Denton become the 24th largest city in Texas.⁷ As a city that houses two major

³ "Denton, TX (Denton County)," TSHA (Texas State Historical Association), accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/denton-tx-denton-county>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Denton City, Texas," Census Bureau QuickFacts, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/dentoncitytexas/PST040219>.

⁶ "The Metroplex Region 2018 Regional Report," The Metroplex Region (Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts), accessed September 4, 2020, <https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/regions/metroplex.php>.

⁷ "Denton, Texas Population 2020," Denton, Texas Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs) (World Population Review), accessed September 4, 2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/denton-tx-population>.

universities, its rapid population growth should come as no surprise; it should also be of no surprise that Denton's cultural dynamics have been strongly shaped by these two major universities.

In order to understand the cultural dynamics of Denton's population, it is important to know the influence that its two universities have had on its population. As mentioned above, Denton's two major universities have significantly contributed to Denton's growth. During the 2019 Fall semester at UNT, 39,192 students were enrolled in classes,⁸ and TWU's student enrolment was 15,846.⁹ The vast majority of these students were enrolled at the Denton location for their respective schools, and were considered residents of Denton during 2019. What this data does not show is the number of Denton residents who moved to Denton to go to school, and continued to live in Denton when they completed their studies.

What is it about these two universities that attract so many students? While there are numerous high-level academic programs at these two schools, both of these schools are known for their excellent art programs – both musical and visual. The UNT College of Music, which had 1,626 students enrolled during the Fall 2019 semester,¹⁰ has an excellent reputation. Boasting the greatest jazz program in the world, UNT's College of Music claims to be the #1 ranked music school in Texas, the #2 ranked music school in the south, and the #12 ranked

⁸ "University of North Texas, Enrollment by Classification & Level," IBM Cognos Viewer (University of North Texas), accessed September 4, 2020, https://factbook.unt.edu/c8_fb/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi?b_action=cognosViewer.

⁹ "TWU Reports Record Enrollment for Fall 2019," TWU reports record enrollment for fall 2019 - News & Events - Texas Woman's University, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://twu.edu/news-events/news/twu-reports-record-enrollment-for-fall-2019/>.

¹⁰ University of North Texas Factbook.

music school in America.¹¹ Meanwhile, the UNT College Visual Arts and Design, which had 2215 students enrolled during Fall 2019,¹² boasts the greatest undergraduate graphic design program in the Southwest.¹³ It is ranked the 10th best visual arts school in Texas.¹⁴ TWU’s School of the Arts, which has the best music therapy program in Texas,¹⁵ had 692 students enrolled during the 2020 Spring semester. This large number of students pursuing degrees in music and visual arts at these two renown schools has cultivated a unique culture that values high-level art and music. In a sense, creativity is the heart-beat of Denton’s culture.¹⁶ However, this academically inspired creativity in Denton’s culture is coupled with a widespread rejection of the Christian faith among those who grew up in the Christian faith and then received their education at its major universities.

There is a phenomenon that is tragically common in Denton, especially on these university campuses. In this city, students from evangelical Christian backgrounds tend to reject the faith that they were raised with. This is a typical occurrence, as Lifeway pointed out: Approximately 47% of teenagers who attended an evangelical Christian church during their

¹¹ “University of North Texas College of Music Rankings and Statistics,” Rankings and Statistics | College of Music, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://music.unt.edu/rankings-and-statistics>.

¹² University of North Texas Factbook.

¹³ “University of North Texas College of Visual Arts and Design Rankings,” University of North Texas, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.unt.edu/rankings/college-visual-arts-design>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Occupational Therapy Ranking 2018: Texas Woman's University,” Occupational Therapy Colleges, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://occupational-therapy-colleges.com/texas-womans-university>.

¹⁶ It should be noted that Denton hosts multiple annual festivals celebrating art and music. These include the Arts and Jazz Fest, the Black Film Festival, and Thin Line Fest, among others. For more information, see: “Denton Live: Festivals and Events,” Discover Denton, Texas, 2020, <https://www.discoverdenton.com/denton-live/festivals-events/>.

teenage years stop going to church when they come to college.¹⁷ There are two notable reasons for this: academic hostility towards the evangelical Christian faith, and difficult experiences in the church. Carter, who is a professor at A&M Commerce points out that “segments of the academy...remain hostile to faith-based ways of knowing.”¹⁸ When students from Christian backgrounds come to universities like the ones in Denton, they are exposed to the world of academic scholarship, and within this world there is little celebration of the Christian faith. Instead, it is a common occurrence for students to be met with arguments against Christianity for which they are unprepared.

Meanwhile, students who leave the church of their childhood and begin their adult lives in Denton often reflect on their history in the church and recall difficult experiences they have had within the church, whether it was an experience of sexual abuse, judgmentalism, or feeling like they never belonged. In 2019, the Houston Chronicle released a series of articles that exposed widespread sexual abuse within Southern Baptist churches.¹⁹ Due to the nature of sexual abuse, it is difficult to get data on the actual extent that it occurs within the church context, because not all victims report their abuse.²⁰ However, the Houston Chronicle’s report noted that more pastors accused of sexual abuse live in Texas than any other state.²¹ It also showed that

¹⁷ Aaron Earls, “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” LifeWay Research, March 18, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>.

¹⁸ Shannon Carter, “Living Inside the Bible Belt,” *College English* 69, no. 6 (July 2007), 574.

¹⁹ Robert Downen, et al., “20 Years, 700 Victims: Southern Baptist Sexual Abuse Spreads as Leaders Resist Reforms,” Houston Chronicle (Houston Chronicle, August 27, 2019), <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php>.

²⁰ “Reporting Sexual Assault: Why Survivors Often Don’t,” Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), accessed September 4, 2020, <https://ocrsm.umd.edu/files/Why-Is-Sexual-Assault-Under-Reported.pdf>.

²¹ Downen, et al.

there is a strong trend of youth pastors specifically abusing teenagers.²² Teenagers who were sexually abused by ministry leaders, such as their youth pastor, grow up like the rest of their peers, and college cities like Denton receive many individuals who may have been sexually abused in a previously attended church. It is a safe assumption that there are several college students in Denton who have experienced some form of sexual abuse in a church. While there are no concrete numbers supporting this, it should be noted that the author has encountered individuals in Denton who experienced some form of sexual abuse from the pastoral leadership in a previously attended church.²³

Other individuals raised in the church move to cities like Denton and recall feelings of being judged harshly by the churches that they had previously attended. Barna notes that about 50% of 18-35 year-olds reported feeling judged by those whom they attended church. This caused various issues with how they related to the church. Many felt they were never able to connect with a church community—that they never belonged. Again, these individuals who felt harshly judged during their time in church as a teenager grow up like the rest of their peers, and college is a typical destination for them. There are numerous college students in Denton who carry heavy baggage from their prior experiences with church. From sexual abuse to simply feeling like they do not fit in with the church crowd, prior experiences with Christianity have taken a psychological toll on numerous individuals who live in Denton, including some congregants at C3 Denton.

²² Lise Olsen, et al., “More than 100 Southern Baptist Youth Pastors Convicted or Charged in Sex Crimes,” Houston Chronicle (Houston Chronicle, August 27, 2019), <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/All-too-often-Southern-Baptist-youth-pastors-13588292.php>.

²³ In accordance with state and federal laws, all allegations of sexual misconduct are reported to authorities. This includes individuals referenced here.

As previously noted, Denton is a rapidly growing city in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, which houses two major universities. These two universities have high-level music and art programs, which have created a unique artistic culture in Denton. There is also an academic culture within these universities that is openly hostile towards Christianity, which many Christian students feel unprepared for. Also, there are scores of students in Denton who carry psychological baggage with them as a result of difficulties from previous church experiences, whether they were related to sexual abuse or simply feeling judged harshly. This is what led Pastor Ross Appleton to plant C3 Denton in 2009.

Aiming to “Show the beauty of Jesus to the heart of Denton,”²⁴ Appleton saw that there were “a bunch of artsy people who are burnt out on Christianity”²⁵ in Denton, and wanted to take Jesus directly to them. C3 Denton began as a Bible study in Pastor Ross Appleton’s living room with a group of former Christians who had rejected the Christian faith while in college. The reasons why many of these people rejected it were a combination of baggage from their previous church experiences, along with an academic culture that was hostile to Christianity. Some of them embraced the Christian faith again as a result of C3 Denton. Its first church meeting had seven attendees, and grew to twenty-five at the end of the first year. According to attendance data, C3 Denton’s attendees grew steadily over ten years, averaging approximately two hundred individuals in service during 2019.²⁶

²⁴ Ross Appleton, “This Is C3,” Christ Community Church, C3 Denton, August 2, 2017, <https://c3denton.com/this-is-c3/>.

²⁵ Ross Appleton, (Senior Pastor, C3 Denton) in discussion with the author, August 2020.

²⁶ Cody McCommas, “Service Attendance at C3 Denton” (unpublished attendance data, September 4, 2020).

While the congregants of C3 Denton come from a variety of backgrounds, the vision of reaching “artsy people who are burnt out on Christianity” still remains central to its ministry focus. In 2017, C3 Denton created its first Annual Church Action/Ministry Plan, and in this plan, there is a section committed to outlining the specific populations that are targeted by the church. In this section, “creatives” and “evangelical wounded”²⁷ were listed as primary populations that the church strives to serve.²⁸ Those who are artistically or musically inclined, and those who carry wounds with them from previously attended churches are listed as a priority for C3 Denton. Their place as a priority was formalized in 2017 because of the original vision of Ross Appleton, coupled with the continued presence of “creatives” and “evangelical wounded” individuals at C3 Denton. These populations continue to be listed as ministry targets for the church each consecutive year.

C3 Denton has consistently attracted artistic individuals with psychological baggage from their previous experiences with Christianity, the hostile academic environment in the local universities, and other sources. One of the primary ways that individuals can heal from these wounds is through pastoral counseling. Ashby explains that pastoral counselors, who focus on the role of God in the lives of those that they counsel, bring about much needed healing to those whom they counsel.²⁹ Whether the individuals have experienced sexual abuse (inside or outside the church), never felt like they fit into churches, or grew to doubt the legitimacy of the Christian faith in the academic environment, pastoral counseling continues to be a primary way that individuals heal from their emotional ailments, especially as they relate to the Christian faith.

²⁷ Cody McCommas, “Annual Church Action/Ministry Plan, 2017” (unpublished internal document, 2017).

²⁸ Also in this list are “Christians Old and New,” “Millennials,” “People Hungry/Dissatisfied with Christianity,” “Young Families,” and “College Students.”

²⁹ Homer U. Ashby, “Values and the Moral Context of Pastoral Counseling,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 20, no. 3 (1981): pp. 176-185, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01561179>, 181.

With this in mind, there is a strong need for trained pastoral counselors at C3 Denton so that these congregants can receive appropriate care.

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of individuals at C3 Denton who are adequately trained to provide these services. Within the laity, there are currently two individuals who are trained in lay pastoral counseling who actively provide their services to congregants as they are able. Both of these individuals work full time jobs, and balancing pastoral counseling with the other demands of life means that their ability to provide their services to other congregants at C3 Denton is limited. This means that the need for pastoral counseling at C3 Denton is primarily bore by its three elders, who also have numerous other responsibilities related to leading the church. C3 Denton has numerous individuals who have a strong need for pastoral counseling, and the number of qualified pastoral counselors, between the laity and the clergy, is not proportionate to the need.

Problem Presented

The need for pastoral counseling services in the American church is expanding, especially at C3 Denton. As individuals struggling with an array of issues seek guidance from religious leaders, the need for pastoral counseling services continues to grow.³⁰ Unfortunately, many pastors are unable to provide adequate pastoral counseling services that meet the needs of the community due to other ministry-related responsibilities. This has become evident at C3 Denton.

Allowing lay pastoral counselors to take some of the burden of pastoral counseling off the shoulders of the clergy by counseling those with minor issues is a helpful solution to this issue, but it raises another issue: this solution requires lay-level training in pastoral counseling.

³⁰ Stella D. Potgieter, "Communities: Development of Church-Based Counselling Teams," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (June 2015), 1.

The problem is that many congregants at C3 Denton who would be willing to provide these services do not understand how to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services.

Purpose Statement

Pastoral counseling is a sensitive ministry. Many who pursue pastoral counseling services have complex emotional wounds that require a unique level of care and understanding.

Individuals who have experienced various forms of trauma, for instance, require counseling that reflects their trauma. Meanwhile, individuals who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts and ideations require counseling with a specialized understanding of the nuances of suicide prevention, and the counselor should understand how to utilize outside resources to ensure that their client is safe. There are a few different forms of struggles that individuals may bring to the table, which the pastoral counselor should be able to address.

Because of the unique nature of pastoral counseling, those who provide pastoral counseling services on the lay level need a foundational training in how to adequately provide pastoral counseling services, even if they are only counseling individuals with minor issues. This training should include basic trauma counseling, a fundamental understanding of suicide and suicidal ideations, common mental illnesses such as depression, and active listening in the counseling setting. The purpose of this Doctorate of Ministry action research thesis is to provide a basic training for the congregants of C3 Denton in how to provide lay-level pastoral counseling to fellow Christians.

In order to cover the previously mentioned necessary topics in lay pastoral counseling training, and adequately prepare lay congregants to provide those services, the researcher will create a six-week training course in lay-level pastoral counseling. Each week will cover a different topic within pastoral counseling, focusing on developing a fundamental understanding

of how to provide basic lay pastoral counseling services. Those who have completed the six-week class will be given a starting point for understanding these issues, and given the opportunity to practice counseling individuals struggling from a variety of common, minor issues.

Basic Assumptions

This thesis is operating under an underlying assumption that C3 Denton will support the research until it has been completed, and that those who are involved in this study will be engaged in all of the activities. This commitment by those who are involved includes participating in each of the six classes, and a pre-class and post-class meeting with the researcher.

Definitions

Active Listening – A strategy for listening which involves the listener focusing on the words and body language of the individual who is speaking, asking questions about what the individual is experiencing, and processing that information to promote further discussion. This approach to listening promotes empathy and genuineness for the listener, making it a helpful listening strategy for counseling.³¹

Biblical Counseling – A form of counseling which specifically submits to the authority of the Bible for counseling techniques, as well as counseling goals. It notably rejects all secular sources in counseling.³²

³¹ Tracy A. Prout and Melanie J. Wadkins, *Essential Interviewing and Counseling Skills: an Integrated Approach to Practice* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2014), 133-134.

³²Y. Campbell-Lane and G.a. Lotter, “Biblical Counselling Regarding Inner Change,” *Koers - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 70, no. 1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v70i1.261>, 101.

Biblical Sufficiency – The Protestant doctrine which asserts that the Bible contains everything required for receiving salvation, pleasing God, and teaching others about salvation and pleasing God. It also asserts that the Bible is self-authenticating.³³

Christian Counseling – A diverse field of counseling that encompasses various schools of counseling thought within the Christian framework. This includes both biblical counseling and pastoral counseling.³⁴

Christian Psychology – Psychology that is informed by Christian theology. While it embraces numerous ideals found in secular psychology, distinctively Christian doctrines such as sin, salvation, and sanctification are used as the foundation for understanding the human condition and the telos of psychology.³⁵

Client-Centered Therapy – Also known as Person-Centered Therapy or Rogerian Theory, Client-Centered Therapy is a therapeutic approach that focuses on creating an environment that allows the client freedom to determine their course of growth. The counselor empowers the client to make the changes in their life that they desire.³⁶

³³ Dennis W Jowers, “The Sufficiency of Scripture and the Biblical Canon,” *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 1 (2009), 49.

³⁴ Mark R. McMinn et al., “Just What Is Christian Counseling Anyway?,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 41, no. 5 (2010): pp. 391-397, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018584>, 391.

³⁵ Richard B. Day, “Incarnational Christian Psychology and Psychotherapy: What Do We Believe and What Do We Do?,” *Pastoral Psychology* 54, no. 6 (2006): pp. 535-544, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-006-0021-6>, 536-537.

³⁶ Keith Tudor and Mike Worrall, *Person-Centred Therapy: a Clinical Philosophy* (London, England: Routledge, 2006), 1.

Empathy – The ability of an individual to accurately understand and adequately respond to the emotions that an individual is feeling.³⁷ Empathy is a necessary element in any form of counseling, especially pastoral counseling.

Lay Pastoral Counseling – Pastoral counseling that is done by laymen, or non-professional pastoral counselors. Most lay pastoral counselors are volunteers.³⁸

Mental Illness – Ailments that primarily affect the mind through a variety of means. Mental illnesses typically fall within the following continuums: Depression, Anxiety, Hypomania-Mania, Psychosis, Negative Symptoms, Dissociation, Eating Disorders, Reinforcement-Based Disorders, and Personality Disorders.³⁹

Minor Issues – For the purpose of this thesis project, an issue needs to meet the following criteria to be considered minor: It must be a topic that is covered in the six-week class (i.e. pornography addiction, situational depression, mild trauma, etc.), and not require a referral (either to an outside party or to the elder team/pastoral staff).

Pastoral Counseling – Counseling that is provided by pastors, clergy, or lay individuals from a religious perspective. While religious ideals typically frame the methodology for the pastoral counselor, there is room for secular psychological sources to influence this as well.⁴⁰ In this

³⁷ Veronica McLaren, Salome Vanwoerden, and Carla Sharp, “The Basic Empathy Scale: Factor Structure and Validity in a Sample of Inpatient Adolescents.,” *Psychological Assessment* 31, no. 10 (2019): pp. 1208-1219, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000741>.

³⁸ James Gordon Emerson, “Lay Pastoral Counseling: Thoughts and Response,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 40, no. 4 (1986): pp. 291-309, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234098604000402>, 305.

³⁹ Brad Bowins, *Mental Illness Defined: Continuums, Regulation, and Defense* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 2.

⁴⁰ Loren L. Townsend, “Research Report: A Grounded Theory Description of Pastoral Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications* 65, no. 3 (2011): pp. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501106500302>, 1-3.

thesis project, Pastoral Counseling specifically refers to counseling provided from a Christian standpoint.

Projection – A process that involves an individual ascribing internally felt feelings and preconceptions onto another individual.⁴¹ In pastoral counseling, it is necessary for the counselor to understand the nature of projections so that they can avoid projecting onto their clients.

Suicidal Ideations – Thoughts of harming oneself, which typically include completed suicide as a fantasy. Suicidal ideations can be a strong risk factor for suicide, but suicide is not always preceded by ideations.⁴²

Trauma – The psychological response of individuals towards difficult or tragic events, such as car wrecks, abuse, etc. Trauma can be short-term, lasting days or weeks, but it can also be long-term, lasting months or years.⁴³

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the potential that some individuals participating may not be present for all six classes, may drop out of the study altogether, or may not give an honest response to the researcher during pre- and post- interviews.

Individuals who are recruited to this study will be asked to attend all six classes, as well as the pre- and post- interviews. However, if an individual gets sick, has an emergency at home, or is overly exhausted from a difficult work day, it is a reasonable assumption that they would

⁴¹ Phebe Cramer, “Externalizing/Projection; Internalizing/Identification: An Examination.,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 37, no. 3 (2020): pp. 207-211, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pap0000255>, 207.

⁴² Carmel M. McAuliffe, “Suicidal Ideation as an Articulation of Intent: A Focus for Suicide Prevention?,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 6, no. 4 (2002): pp. 325-338, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811110214524>, 326.

⁴³ “Trauma,” American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association), accessed September 6, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma>.

not participate in the class during that specific week. This would prevent the individual from receiving a portion of their lay pastoral counseling training.

Meanwhile, there may be situations warranting an individual drop out of the study altogether. This may happen as a result of the individual who is participating feeling overwhelmed by an already busy schedule, needing to focus more on other priorities, or any other number of reasons.

Finally, individuals who are participating may not always give an honest representation of their skills in lay pastoral counseling during the pre- and post- interviews. This could be the result of the individual desiring to be seen with greater ministry competence, lack of confidence in their own abilities, or another reason.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study includes the virtual medium of this class, the time frame of the study, the number of participants involved, and the demographics of those involved in this study.

With the Covid-19 pandemic in mind, the training course in Lay Pastoral Counseling will be done virtually through the Zoom platform. Zoom is a virtual conferencing platform which has been heavily utilized by schools, churches, and businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic to host virtual meetings.

In order to ensure that this class is accessible, the class sessions will be scheduled on Wednesday evenings, from 7:00 to 8:30 PM. The first meeting will occur on January 6th, 2021 and continue each consecutive Wednesday until February 10th, 2021.

This study will involve ten participants, who will be given a pre- and post- interview. They will be chosen based on two factors: their desire to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services, and a lack of training in lay-level pastoral counseling.

Thesis Statement

Given the reality that the pastoral staff at C3 Denton is not able to adequately meet the need for pastoral counseling within the congregation, allowing some of this burden to be shouldered by lay congregants is a helpful way to meet this need. However, because of the sensitivity of pastoral counseling, it is necessary that these congregants who share the load of pastoral counseling are given a basic, fundamental training in pastoral counseling. This will enable them to navigate the terrain of lay pastoral counseling, and help those whom they counsel feel adequately cared for. Because C3 Denton has never offered a training like this to its congregants, developing and implementing a program that provides this training will be deeply beneficial to its congregants and leadership.

This thesis project sought to show that if some of the congregants of C3 Denton are given a basic training in lay-level pastoral counseling, then they will be better equipped to provide counseling to other congregants experiencing minor issues. This basic training will involve ten participants going through Applying Hope, which is a six-week class created by the researcher that is specifically geared towards developing a basic framework for understanding and practicing lay pastoral counseling.

This thesis project will be considered a success if the majority of the participants who took and completed the Applying Hope class feel prepared to provide lay level pastoral

counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton that are experiencing minor issues.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ The majority will be determined by the number of people who participate in this study and complete the Applying Hope class. If all ten participants successfully complete this class, and at least six feel prepared to provide their services, then the thesis project will be considered a success. If one or more participants do not complete this class, then the success will be based off of the number of participants who completed the Applying Hope class (i.e. If seven participants complete the class, then four or more would be considered a majority).

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

To provide a conceptual framework for this thesis project, this chapter will focus on analyzing the literary, theological, and theoretical elements of lay-level pastoral counseling. The first section of this chapter is a literature review that will explore the necessity of training lay pastoral counselors, the foundations of training lay pastoral counselors, an analysis of the controversy surrounding biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling, and mental health concerns in pastoral counseling. The second section of this chapter will discuss the theological foundations of the project, which includes an exposition on God's eternal plan for soul healing, God's plan for soul healing through pastoral counselors, as well as the theological basis for lay pastoral counseling. The third section of this chapter will discuss the theoretical foundations of this project.

Literature Review

Pastoral counseling, as explained by Lambert, is a necessary and meaningful ministry of the local church.⁴⁵ Townsend supports this by explaining that it nurtures the community.⁴⁶ According to Potgieter, religion plays an important role in the lives of the majority of Americans,⁴⁷ making counseling from a religious perspective is inherently valuable to many. Seeking advice on a range of issues from personal problems to mental illnesses, she points out

⁴⁵ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: the Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 304.

⁴⁶ Loren Townsend, *Introduction to Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009) 19.

⁴⁷ Stella D. Potgieter, "Communities: Development of Church-Based Counselling Teams," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (June 2015), 1.

that it is common for Americans to turn to religious institutions for counseling.⁴⁸ Of course, the clergy is not always able to handle the demand from the community for pastoral counseling services.⁴⁹ To aid the clergy with the burden of pastoral counseling, Potgieter explains it is necessary for lay church members to receive training in pastoral counseling.⁵⁰ In order to create a training program for lay pastoral counselors, this literature review explores the topic of lay pastoral counseling, which includes the fundamental elements of training lay pastoral counselors, the controversy of biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling, and mental illnesses and their relationship to pastoral counseling.

Necessity of Training Lay Pastoral Counselors

One theme that runs through the literature of church-based pastoral counseling is the necessity of training lay church members to provide pastoral counseling services. A movement of lay pastoral counselors has made its way through the church, and its related literature has potentially reached millions of individuals. Garzon, et al. assert that this is in response to the realities that many Americans do not have access to adequate counseling services,⁵¹ and the value that they place on religion leads them to seek it from the church. He also explains that many pastors are unable to meet the needs of counseling in the church.⁵² Tan and Scalise expound upon this by pointing out that our churches are “full of hurting people who are struggling,” while showing that the average pastor spends a negligible amount of time counseling

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Potgieter, “Communities” 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fernando Garzon et al., “Lay Christian Counseling and Client Expectations for Integration in Therapy,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28, no. 2 (2009), 113.

⁵² Ibid.

parishioners.⁵³ There is a need for pastoral counseling within the church that is largely unmet.

The need for it is especially true when one considers the nature of counseling as it pertains to the needs that lie underneath the surface of the individual. Often, individuals will pursue pastoral counseling for a specific life situation, expecting to get to the bottom of it quickly and move on. Miller, et al. points out that the core problems that the person is experiencing are often much bigger than the specific situations that they are seeking pastoral counseling for.⁵⁴

Whenever a pastoral counselor exposes a core problem to the individual, there is a much higher need for pastoral counseling. For instance, an individual goes to see a pastoral counselor for his anger problems, hoping to learn some anger management strategies. The pastoral counselor begins by asking the client about his childhood, and the client casually mentions that he was sexually abused as a child, but does not think that it has to do with his current anger problems. The pastoral counselor pauses, recounts this traumatic event with the client, and the client is flooded with previously unmet emotions. The client realizes that the shame from his childhood sexual abuse has clouded his judgements ever since. Instead of just giving the client some anger management tools at this point, the counselor should devote significant time to helping the client heal from those childhood wounds. This is not something that occurs in a few sessions; it is a core issue that requires an extensive time investment.

Unfortunately, many pastors do not have the time to give a client thorough counseling for issues as large as these. The gut reaction may be to recommend someone like this client to

⁵³ Siang-Yang Tan and Eric T. Scalise, *Lay Counseling: Equipping Christians for a Helping Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 12.

⁵⁴ Philip J. Henry, Lori Marie. Figueroa, and David R. Miller, *The Christian Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Christian Counseling* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2007), 37-38.

professional counseling, but according to Garzon, many Americans do not have access to services like these due to lack of resources.⁵⁵ A helpful solution is to train lay counselors so they can provide pastoral counseling services that are adequate and accessible. This is where the movement for training lay counselors comes into play. With extensive literature surrounding this movement, including books, articles, dissertations, and training programs, the movement to train lay pastoral counselors is continuing to grow.

While there are several programs focused on training lay pastoral counselors,⁵⁶ many of them require a level of commitment that is higher than what most lay people are able to meet.⁵⁷ There is currently no program available for giving a training to lay congregants in pastoral counseling that can be accomplished in six one-hour sessions. This shows a gap in the literature which this thesis project seeks to fill.

Foundations for Lay Pastoral Counselor Training

Another theme that runs through the literature of pastoral counseling is the need for adequate training for pastoral counselors, as well as the sources used in their training and counseling practices. Floyd notes that well-meaning untrained pastoral counselors can unintentionally cause harm to those they are counseling.⁵⁸ This is because the issues that lead people to pastoral counseling tend to involve emotional vulnerability. In order for lay pastoral

⁵⁵ Garzon, 113.

⁵⁶ These programs include Henderson's Equipped to Counsel, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors' Counseling Discipleship Training, and the Biblical Counseling Center's Lay Counseling Certificate Program, among many others.

⁵⁷ The Equipped to Counsel program can take between twelve weeks and a year to complete; the Counseling Discipleship Training can be completed in three weekends (Friday 5-9:45, Saturday 9-5), and the Lay Counseling Certificate Program typically takes between twelve and sixteen months to complete.

⁵⁸ Scott Floyd, *Crisis Counseling: A Guide for Pastors and Professionals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 18.

counseling to achieve its purpose, according to Lum, it is necessary for adequate training to be available.⁵⁹ Beckner asserts that this need for training is amplified by the fact that many individuals seeking pastoral counseling have complex counseling needs, such as mental health issues.⁶⁰ This training should have foundations that are biblically and theologically rooted, and some argue that it should draw from secular sources as well, but there is a debate regarding this. In order to determine if secular sources should be appropriated into a lay pastoral counseling training program, this debate will be analyzed.

Biblical and Secular Foundations

Possibly the largest theme within Christian pastoral counseling is the relationship of counseling to the Bible. There are a number of questions that have been asked, such as if the Bible is sufficient for pastoral counseling, or if secular sources should be integrated. If they should be integrated, to what extent should they be integrated? In order to adequately train lay pastoral counselors, these questions must be addressed. This section will analyze the concept of biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling and the controversy surrounding it, as well as a secular concept that can be integrated into pastoral counseling.

Debate Over Scriptural Sufficiency in Pastoral Counseling

According to Lambert, the theme of biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling refers to the extent that biblical ideals are used in counseling.⁶¹ The concepts in the Bible, as well as the themes that run throughout it are the only guiding principles of a pastoral counselor who ascribes

⁵⁹ Joseph Lum. "An Introductory Lay Counseling Course: Sharpening Shepherding Skills." DMin diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005.

⁶⁰ Gene Beckner. "Counseling Experiences and Counselee Satisfaction with Church-Based Lay Counseling Services." PhD diss., Walden University, 2014.

⁶¹ Lambert, 38.

to the sufficiency of the Bible in this context. In other words, the technique of the pastoral counselor ascribing to biblical sufficiency in counseling is rooted solely in an applied exegesis, rejecting all secular ideas. Meanwhile, pastoral counselors who do not ascribe to biblical sufficiency in counseling tend to integrate secular ideals with biblical ideals in their pastoral counseling technique.

There is disagreement about biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling. There are scholars in this field who believe that sufficiency of the Bible in counseling is a distortion of the Protestant doctrine of biblical sufficiency.⁶² Eric Johnson, who is a Christian psychologist that rejects biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling, is one of the leading scholars in this school of thought. He asserts that the Protestant Reformers who argued for biblical sufficiency believed that the Bible was only sufficient for matters of “first principles of Christianity”,⁶³ which involves doctrinal matters such as soteriology.⁶⁴ According to Johnson, biblical sufficiency does not apply to the world of pastoral counseling.⁶⁵

This is seen practically in his integration of biblical and non-biblical therapeutic models in counseling.⁶⁶ Johnson points out that there are some “specific strategies given in the Bible”⁶⁷ for soul-care, which is the aim of counseling. These strategies include expressing salvation as a means for healing, viewing maturity with a Christ-focused goal, and developing theocentric self-

⁶² Lambert, 39.

⁶³ Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 181.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 182.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 48.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

talk,⁶⁸ among others. When applied by a pastoral counselor, biblical strategies like these are extremely effective. However, they should not be the only approaches of the pastoral counselor. The well-informed pastoral counselor also incorporates wisdom from secular sources. For Johnson, these may include findings in the DSM-IV (now the DSM-5), the dynamics of family influence,⁶⁹ and even basic group therapy. In Johnson's view, this integration of biblical and secular concepts makes for a well-rounded pastoral counselor.

Meanwhile, there are other scholars who assert that secular sources have no place in pastoral counseling. Lambert, who is the executive director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, is one of the scholarly leaders of this movement. Claiming that the Bible is completely sufficient for every counseling-related issue,⁷⁰ he rejects the influence of secular sources in pastoral counseling. Lambert believes that the root of mental illnesses and psychological distress is the result of sin and the fall,⁷¹ that secular psychology is "oriented away from God,"⁷² and that the field of psychology does not have the ability to address the theological realities of man's brokenness.⁷³ The only source for effective pastoral counseling, according to Lambert, is the Bible.

His understanding of biblical sufficiency in pastoral counseling involves the Bible being sufficient for pastoral counseling in common issues such as relational and financial issues, as

⁶⁸ Johnson, 45-48.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 221.

⁷⁰ Heath Lambert, "95 Theses for an Authentically Christian Commitment to Counseling," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, 2018.

⁷¹ Heath Lambert, Stuart Scott, and John MacArthur, *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 7-8.

⁷² Ibid, 8.

⁷³ Ibid.

well as complex issues such as mental illness and addiction.⁷⁴ The Bible speaks clearly on how to approach many common issues; the complex issues are approached with the theological concept of dichotomy, meaning that the client is viewed as both body and soul and both should be treated.⁷⁵ Because difficulties like mental illness have both “physical and spiritual implications,”⁷⁶ the pastoral counselor should welcome bodily treatment (i.e. medicine), while implementing biblical soul-care strategies. One complaint that Lambert raises about secular approaches is that they reduce individuals into their diagnoses, and only treat their sicknesses without caring for the larger spiritual realities.⁷⁷ The dichotomous approach that Lambert puts forward embraces the reality of mental illnesses while simultaneously applying scriptural concepts in treating the client’s soul.

At the heart of this controversy is a debate over the doctrine of scriptural sufficiency and if it applies to counseling. For Johnson, scriptural sufficiency means that the Bible is sufficient for explaining everything that man needs to know for salvation and doctrine. While salvific themes play a role in pastoral counseling, there is more to pastoral counseling than salvation and doctrine, which warrants the use of secular sources in pastoral counseling.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Lambert asserts that secular sources in counseling are in opposition to the truths of God’s word, and threaten its sufficiency.⁷⁹ Because of this, any source that is not grounded in the Scriptures

⁷⁴ Lambert et al, *Counseling the Hard Cases*, 8.

⁷⁵ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: the Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 322.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Johnson 180.

⁷⁹ Lambert 41.

should be rejected in pastoral counseling. Both of these scholars make very strong arguments for their cause, but Johnson's argument is rooted in the historical Protestant tradition.⁸⁰ While Lambert's approach does have its strengths, it does not have as much grounding in the historical doctrine of scriptural sufficiency as Johnson's.

The historical Protestant tradition, as it relates to the sufficiency of Scripture, views the Bible as being completely sufficient for explaining what the individual needs to know for salvation and doctrine. This can be understood through analyzing three of the foundational Protestant confessions of faith: The 1559 Belgic Confession, the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, and the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. These three confessions shaped the Protestant conception of Christian faith, especially as it refers to biblical sufficiency. A brief analysis of these confessions can shed light onto biblical sufficiency, and why it does not apply to pastoral counseling.

In Article 7 of the Belgic Confession, the sufficiency of Scripture is explained. In this article, the opening statement is clear that "...everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in [the Scriptures]."⁸¹ Soteriological and doctrinal matters are viewed as central to the concept of scriptural sufficiency in this confession. While it goes on to firmly reject anything that is contrary to the Scriptures, the first paragraph shows that it is only referencing the will of God as it relates to soteriology and doctrines of the church.

Meanwhile, the Westminster Confession of Faith upholds this concept. In line with the Belgic Confession, Question Two of Westminster's Larger Catechism makes it clear that "[the

⁸⁰ Johnson 180

⁸¹ "Belgic Confession." Christian Reformed Church. Accessed November 26, 2020. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession>.

Scriptures] effectually reveal God unto men for their salvation.”⁸² Once more, the Scriptures are displayed as a means for man to understand salvation, and anything contrary to the Scriptures regarding soteriology and doctrine should be eschewed by the church.

Finally, the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith continues to affirm this message in its opening statement that “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience...”⁸³ The concept of scriptural sufficiency from the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith is echoed in the London Baptist Confession of Faith.

All three of these Protestant confessions show the Bible as being sufficient for matters pertaining to salvation and doctrine, rejecting any outside voices that contradict the Bible in these areas. However, nowhere in these confessions is the sufficiency of Scriptures applied to pastoral counseling. Of course, pastoral counseling was not a formal discipline at the time that these confessions were written; however, the message of scriptural sufficiency in these creeds is clear: it relates to salvation and doctrine. Because pastoral counseling is not primarily a matter of salvation (though salvific themes play a part in it), or doctrine (though biblical doctrine informs it), the historical Protestant tradition as defined by these creeds would not place pastoral counseling into a place of submission to scriptural sufficiency.

Johnson’s approach of integrating secular sources into pastoral counseling is not forbidden in the Protestant tradition. In fact, not subjecting pastoral counseling to scriptural sufficiency is in line with how the framers of the Protestant tradition viewed the doctrine of

⁸² “Westminster Confession.” PCA Administrative Committee, Last modified December 5, 2019. <https://www.pcaac.org/bco/westminster-confession/>.

⁸³ “1689 Baptist Confession.” Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America. Accessed November 26, 2020. <https://www.arbca.com/1689-chapter1>.

sufficiency. Lambert's approach of rejecting any secular sources in pastoral counseling due to the sufficiency of Scripture, however, is not historically represented this doctrine. Because of these reasons, a training program for lay pastoral counselors is free to integrate secular sources with scriptural concepts.

Secular Integration

Realizing that it is appropriate to integrate secular sources into pastoral counseling, the extent of the influence and usage of these ideals comes into question, as well as which secular ideals to choose from in forming a lay counseling training program. In an interview on this topic, Paul Tripp explained that pastoral counselors should humbly listen to the wisdom that the secular counseling community has to offer, allowing it to inform our approach, while not being "taken captive to any system of hope that omits the Lord of hope, Jesus Christ."⁸⁴ Integration of secular ideals in pastoral counseling means having a counseling technique that is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible, yet simultaneously shaped by the wisdom of non-biblical concepts presented by the larger counseling community. In other words, the proper approach is biblically grounded, with room for some secular influences.

Within this framework, there are a plethora of ideas presented by the broader counseling community which can be integrated into a lay pastoral counseling program. The focus of this program will be Rogerian Theory, also known as Client-Centered Therapy, because the components of this counseling theory are easily synthesized with the biblical framework in pastoral counseling, and can be easily and effectively utilized in a training program for lay pastoral counselors.

⁸⁴ Paul Tripp, "Living in Light of the Gospel: An Interview with Paul David Tripp," *Tabletalk*, September 1, 2011.

Harvard's Mental Health newsletter explains that Rogerian Theory is a counseling theory that was developed by Carl Rogers throughout his career as a clinical psychologist.⁸⁵ With over fifty journals and two hundred organizations ascribing to some form of Rogerian-style therapy, its influence is felt around the psychological and therapeutic world.⁸⁶ There are numerous aspects about this theory that could be addressed here, but for brevity's sake, the focus will be on innate self-actualization, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic response.

Innate self-actualization is one of the central tenets of Rogerian Theory. Bevar, et al. points out that this concept means the therapist empowers the client to discover their own hidden potential and chart their own course for meeting it.⁸⁷ This is because the individual has their own best interests at heart, and the counselor is the one who guides them to it. It is a helpful concept for guiding the client into Christological maturity, or sanctification, because the focus is not on adhering to a prescribed set of standards as Johnson notes,⁸⁸ but on the client allowing the Holy Spirit to bear fruit as he explores his inner self.

Meanwhile, unconditional positive regard is a tenet of Rogerian Theory that prevents the counselor's values from interfering with the progress of the client. Unconditional positive regard means that the counselor does not "judge or evaluate" the client,⁸⁹ but accepts their reality and choices. This does not mean that the pastoral counselor always approves of the actions of the

⁸⁵ "Client-Centered Therapy," Harvard Mental Health, accessed August 7, 2020, https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/Client-centered_therapy.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Raphael Bevar, et al. "The Client-Therapist Relationship: A Comparison of Second-Order Family Therapy and Rogerian Theory" *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 16 no. 2, (June 1997), 185.

⁸⁸Johnson 46-47

⁸⁹Denise Kensit, "Rogerian Theory: A Critique of the Effectiveness of Pure Client-Centered Therapy" *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*. 13, no. 4, (2000), 346.

client, but it means that the pastoral counselor's approval is irrelevant. The pastoral counselor creates an atmosphere of positivity, coupled with "respect and trust" for the client, according to Kensing.⁹⁰ This tenet of Rogerian theory can be synthesized with the biblical framework. For the sake of the client's soul, there are times when the pastoral counselor should call them to repent of sins, as Johnson explains,⁹¹ but it should be done within the context of unconditional positive regard for the client. This was displayed by Christ who responded to the lying rich man from a place of love.⁹²

Finally, Casemore, et al. notes that empathetic response means that the counselor strives to understand the lived difficulties of the client from their frame of reference, and respond in kind.⁹³ This means that the counselor does not attempt to compare the client's experience to other people's experiences, but instead uses active listening skills to gain a deeper conception of how the difficulties specifically affect them. Once that has been accomplished, the counselor gains a sense of the emotions of the client, and mirrors them from a place of understanding. This clearly gives a framework for the counselor to apply Romans 12:15 in counseling, and rejoice with the client that rejoices, weeping with the client that weeps.

As helpful as Rogerian Theory is, it comes with its fair share of criticism. For instance, there are individuals like Margolin who argue that in practice, Rogerian counseling is deeply affected by the preconceived notions of the counselor,⁹⁴ noting that the unconditional positive

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Johnson 70, 483.

⁹²Mark 10:21, English Standard Version.

⁹³Roger Casemore, et al *Person-Centered Therapy and CBT: Siblings not Rivals*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 87.

⁹⁴ Leslie Margolin, "Rogerian Psychotherapy and the Problem of Power: A Foucauldian Interpretation." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 60, no. 1 (January, 2020).

regard of the Rogerian counselor may be affected by how the client mirrors their style.⁹⁵ In fact, Margolin points out that in counseling sessions with Carl Rogers, clients who expressed themselves in a manner that was outside of Roger’s approach were met with a counselor who “tended to show less empathy, less warmth, and acceptance.”⁹⁶ Even fields outside of counseling which have embraced Rogerian theory, such as nursing, have expressed similar concerns, as explained by Crawford, et al.⁹⁷

This is a very serious accusation that some individuals have raised against Rogerian Theory. While their critique is valid and should be considered, it does not negate the good that is accomplished through Rogerian counseling. Despite this allegation, Rogerian Theory is still an extremely reputable counseling technique. Rather than using criticisms from individuals like Margolin to dismiss Rogerian Theory, these criticisms should be used to educate lay pastoral counselors in what they should avoid while providing their services. A course in lay-level pastoral counseling influenced by Rogerian Theory should point out the necessity of retaining unconditional positive regard, regardless of how the client responds to their counseling regimen.

Rogerian Theory is a concept of secular counseling that has strong benefit for the pastoral counselor. Because of this, it will be utilized in creating a training program for lay pastoral counselors, and will use common criticisms of Rogerian Theory as an educational tool.

Mental Health Issues in Pastoral Counseling

The last theme that this literature review will explore is the theme of mental health as it relates to creating a lay pastoral counseling program. The unfortunate reality is that many

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Nelma Crawford, et al. “Empowerment: Reformulation of a Non-Rogerian Concept.” *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 17, no. 3 (July, 2004), 253.

Americans live with mental illnesses. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 18.9% of American adults live with an Any Mental Illness (AMI), and 4.5% of American adults live with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI).⁹⁸ Many of these adults with mental illnesses require treatment beyond what a pastoral counselor can provide, lay or ordained.

When a pastoral counselor without formal training in the disciplines of psychiatry or psychology encounters an individual who is struggling with mental illness, the instinct may be to immediately consider their lack of qualifications, and swiftly refer them to someone more qualified that can handle them. While it is true that many individuals need specialized care for their mental illnesses, Emlet notes that pastoral counselors should not be “scared off by diagnosis.”⁹⁹ Mental illnesses should not keep the pastoral counselor from providing care for the entire person, especially when their help is needed.¹⁰⁰

In the context of a lay pastoral counselor training program, Powell helpfully notes that aspiring pastoral counselors can be exposed to a proper response to mental illnesses with “workshops, training, seminars, and other forms of communication.”¹⁰¹ When this occurs, the lay pastoral counselors can develop a culture in the church that welcomes and embraces those with mental illnesses, providing their services in an appropriate manner while simultaneously encouraging those who need professional help to receive it, and supporting them along the way.

Conclusion

⁹⁸ “Mental Illness,” National Institute of Mental Health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), accessed August 8, 2020, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>.

⁹⁹ Michael R. Emlet, *Descriptions and Prescriptions: a Biblical Perspective on Psychiatric Diagnoses and Medications* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017), 35.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ William T Powell, “How Understanding Congregant Attitude Can Help Define a Mental Health Ministry.” (Dmin thesis project, Virginia Union University, 2020), 17.

The literature related to lay pastoral counseling has multiple themes running throughout it. These include the necessities of training lay pastoral counselors, the foundations for training them, as well as a controversy surrounding the use of secular sources in pastoral counseling, and pastoral counseling for those with mental health issues. After exploring these themes, it became evident that there is a strong need for training lay pastoral counselors, and that secular sources can rightfully be integrated with biblical concepts in a training program. In particular, Rogerian Theory is a helpful secular source that can be implemented in a training program because of how easily it synthesizes with a variety of biblical themes.

Theological Foundations

God is near to the broken-hearted, and part of His plan of redemption is to bring healing to the souls of those who are wounded. The soul healing that God promises will be fully realized when Christ returns, and pastoral counselors bring a sliver of this healing through counseling wounded individuals. Pastoral counseling is often done by clergy, but there is biblical warrant for it to be done by the laity as well. To understand the theological foundations for creating a lay pastoral counselor training program, this section will analyze God's eternal plan for soul healing, God's plan for soul healing through pastoral counselors, and a theological basis for lay pastoral counseling.

God's Eternal Plan for Soul Healing

The theological cornerstone for this project, and for the entire discipline of pastoral counseling, is God's eternal plan to bring about healing to the souls of His people—especially those who carry deep internal wounds. Psalm 34:18 says that “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” This passage communicates a unique closeness

that God has to believers who have broken hearts and sorrowful spirits. Longman explains this concept by saying that God gives help to individuals who are internally wounded, both psychologically and emotionally.¹⁰² Christians who carry internal wounds have a special nearness to God, and the telos of this nearness is healing. These internal wounds can have a variety of causes: childhood trauma, sexual abuse, grief, mental illness, and a number of other factors. According to Stebnicki, negative life-altering events such as being laid-off or mental illnesses like anxiety can create a struggle within that can also cause wounding.¹⁰³ Internal wounds like these can cause severe difficulty for believers who suffer from them, and nearness to God is not always felt. However, the Bible promises healing to all the wounds of Christians; specifically, emotional wounds that are felt internally.

The healing of the Gospel will be fully realized when Christ returns, as expressed in John's vision of restored creation in Revelation 21 and 22. In this vision, there is special attention paid to the healing of emotional wounds in Revelation 21:4, where John explains that God will "wipe away every tear from their eyes [believers], and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." This is the fullest expression of healing for all who suffer from internal wounds, both emotional and psychological. Weinrich, et al. points out that this shows the end of suffering for the all of the saints.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of what psychological baggage that a believer is carrying, there is an eternal healing that is promised to them by the Gospel. When Christ has returned and restored

¹⁰² Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic/ InterVarsity Press, 2014), 170.

¹⁰³ Mark A. Stebnicki, *Disaster Mental Health Counseling: Responding to Trauma in a Multicultural Context* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, LLC, 2017), 16.

¹⁰⁴ William C. Weinrich et al., *Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

creation, all believers who are suffering from internal wounds will have perfect restoration and healing from them,¹⁰⁵ and will fully experience the nearness to God that is promised to them in Psalm 34:18.

This eternal healing of the Gospel is accomplished through the Gospel. By the Gospel of Jesus Christ, believers are promised healing. This can be understood through analyzing Isaiah 53, which has historically been understood as a prophecy about Christ, according to Schipper,¹⁰⁶ as well as 2nd Peter 2:22-25, a passage that references Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53:5 explains that there is one coming who will suffer for our healing: “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace; and with his wounds we are healed.” The coming one prophesied by Isaiah 53 is one who will experience agony for the benefit of who he came for. Moyise makes it clear that this passage prophesies Christ’s coming. This is evidenced by the parallel between Isaiah 53 and 1st Peter 2:22-25. He points out there are seven statements about the coming suffering servant in Isaiah 53 that are referenced in 1st Peter 2, including “with his wounds we are healed.” 1st Peter 2:24 concludes with “By his wounds you have been healed.” Moyise makes it clear that both of these passages, Isaiah 53 and 1st Peter 2 are specifically referencing Christ—the first before Christ came, and the second after Christ had come.¹⁰⁷

With this in mind, Isaiah 53:5 is a strong reference point for understanding the Gospel as it relates to healing. In Christ’s crucifixion, He suffered deeply for the transgressions and

¹⁰⁵ Henry Brinton, “Revelation 21:1-22:7,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 70, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁰⁶ Jeremy Schipper, “Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 2 (2013): pp. 315-325, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2013.0022>.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Moyise, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets: "Prophets in the New Testament"* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 653.

iniquities of believers, which bridged the gap between God and sinful man. This paved the way for forgiveness and reconciliation between the two parties. Forgiveness and reconciliation with God is already incredible news for the sinner, and this news should not be taken lightly. The Gospel of Jesus Christ necessarily means that sinners can be forgiven. However, the Gospel does not stop there, according to Isaiah 53:5. Christ also brought peace and healing for believers through His suffering. In fact, it is through Christ's suffering, according to VandenBerg, that all suffering for believers will end.¹⁰⁸ Peace and healing, for the believer, are direct effects of the Gospel because Christ died and rose again.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the supreme source of all healing for believers. Because God became a man, bore the weight of sin through His death, and rose from the grave, believers have access to an eternity of joy where their healing will be perfected. This is especially true of internal, emotional wounds. However, healing for these wounds does not begin with Christ's return; there is a partial manifestation of spiritual healing for Christians that is accessible in this life.

Healing Partially Realized Now

As previously stated, the eternal healing for wounded believers will be fully realized when Christ returns, and based on the vision of a restored creation in Revelation 21 and 22, this will clearly be a joyful event. However, this healing of the soul is not isolated to the eternal kingdom of the future; for those who are in Christ, perfect healing is partially available while the individual lives today, according to Arjona.¹⁰⁹ This can be understood by analyzing the Lord's

¹⁰⁸ Mary VandenBerg, "Redemptive Suffering: Christ's Alone," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6, no. 4 (November 2007): pp. 391-411, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0036930607003717>.

¹⁰⁹ Rubén Arjona, "John Calvin on the Lord's Supper: Food, Rest, and Healing for Shivering Souls," *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 2 (2016): pp. 177-190, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-016-0740-2>.

Prayer. In Matthew 6, Jesus instructs believers in how to pray. Verse 10 of this prayer says “[God’s] kingdom come, [God’s] will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.” Believers are instructed to pray for God’s kingdom and God’s will to be done on Earth, and part of God’s kingdom and will is soul healing. Because God is gracious, believers are able to experience healing from their internal wounds in this life.

In his exposition on the Lord’s Prayer, Sikorsky claims that “...the entire first part of the Lord’s Prayer deals mainly with...the termination of the present era of compromise, suffering and of death and will open the new one of light, complete harmony, good will, happiness, and everlasting life.” That is, when Christ returns, suffering will end and healing will be perfected. However, Sikorsky’s claim does not end with the future return of Christ. He explains this prayer further by stating that “The strangest and most encouraging aspect of the prayer is that [the Christian is] on the way to this happy, eternal existence.”¹¹⁰ While those who are in Christ will not experience the fullness of eternal healing in this life, he asserts that God’s kingdom coming and will being done on Earth involves believers beginning to experience this healing before Christ’s arrival. In that sense, the internal healing of the soul that the pastoral counselor facilitates is a preview of what is to come.

This point is made even more clear by Martin Luther. In the section on the Lord’s Prayer in his Shorter Catechism, Luther points out that “it is the will of the devil, the world and our own flesh...” that “...the coming of [God’s] kingdom to us is prevented.”¹¹¹ There are numerous oppositions to the healing power of God’s kingdom coming and His will being done, which

¹¹⁰ Ivan Sikorsky, *The Message of the Lord's Prayer* (Burtyrki Books, 2020), 31.

¹¹¹ Martin Luther, “Large Catechism: The Lord's Prayer,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed December 7, 2020, https://ccel.org/ccel/luther/largecatechism/largecatechism.i_4.html.

should be considered. These oppositions can create and intensify the internal wounds that cause the believer to long for the healing of God. While Luther views this healing as being ultimately eschatological, he continues his exposition of Matthew 6:10 by saying that God “comforteth and preserveth us steadily... to the end of our lives.”¹¹² This healing that God provides to believers in this life is sufficient to preserve their faith against its numerous oppositions, and it is also a shadow of the perfect healing that is to come.

At this point, the following question could be raised: How can pastoral counselors facilitate the manifestation of God’s kingdom coming and God’s will being done on Earth through their craft, even in a partial sense? John 14:12 sheds light on this. Christ says that “...anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these...”. Of course, the works that Christ did were typically works of healing, which pointed to His divinity. In this passage, Christ claimed that His followers will do more than what He could accomplish on Earth. John Calvin explains this passage by saying that “[Christ’s] Divinity was not confined to the person of Christ, but was diffused through the whole body of the Church.”¹¹³ Through the Holy Spirit, the church has the presence of Christ residing within it, enabling it to bring about healing to others on an even greater scale than Christ accomplished during His physical life on Earth.

With God’s plan for eternal soul-healing in mind, it is apparent that pastoral counselors who practice their craft around the world participate in doing “greater things than these...” by facilitating internal healing in their clients. When this occurs, given that the client is a believer,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ John Calvin, “John 14:8-14,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35/calcom35.iv.ii.html>.

the client experiences the beginning of their healing, which will be fully realized when Christ returns, and the vision of Revelation 21 and 22 actualizes.

God's Plan for Soul Healing Through Pastoral Counselors

God's plan for soul healing will be fully realized when Christ returns, but God has provided a means for healing to be experienced in part today through pastoral counselors. Pastoral counselors are individuals who embody the wisdom of speech in Proverbs 12:18. In reference to those who have experienced wounds, Proverbs 12:18 says that "the tongue of the wise brings healing." Wilson explains that adequate words can bring about healing for those who are wounded, which can actually catalyze growth.¹¹⁴ Pastoral counselors can have healing words, and these healing words come from biblical wisdom. Vox notes that this wisdom is equated with calmness that informs the speech.¹¹⁵ Pastoral counselors are individuals that God has specifically equipped with this specific form of wisdom who are able to speak in a manner that brings about healing.

The specifics of this wisdom can be understood through analyzing various biblical ideals. For instance, James 1:19 expresses an important attribute of Christian character: being "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." McCartney notes that control of the tongue is referenced as a trueness of faith, which brings about God's righteousness.¹¹⁶ As noted before, God's plan involves healing of those who have experienced internal wounding, and the attribute of being quick to hear and slow to speak is an avenue that this healing presence of God is manifested. This is specifically true of pastoral counselors.

¹¹⁴ Lindsay Wilson, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, USA, 2018), 165.

¹¹⁵ Micahel Vox, *Proverbs 10-31*, vol. 188 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 556.

¹¹⁶ Dan McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 115.

Meanwhile, 1st Thessalonians 5:14 gives direct instruction for believers to “encourage the fainthearted.” Stott mentions that this encouragement and care should be geared towards those who are especially needy within the congregation.¹¹⁷ Those who are internally wounded have a special need, and require significant encouragement. While this encouragement should come from all believers, pastoral counselors bring encouragement in a specialized manner, which involves the healing wisdom of Proverbs 12:18.

What may be the most important biblical and theological aspect of pastoral counseling is Christ-focused spiritual formation, or Christiformity, as Erickson explains.¹¹⁸ This is the intentional use of counseling to develop an understanding of theological Christian truths that penetrate into the spirit of the client, shaping and maturing them in their faith. Or, as Romans 12:2 puts it, being “transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” This transformation that is spoken of by Romans 12:2, according to Erickson, involves theological truths being put into practice, which requires reflection and meditation.¹¹⁹

For individuals who are struggling with internal wounds, reflection and meditation on theological truths may not be achievable due to a lack of spiritual formation, but pastoral counseling can catalyze it. Johnson explains that pastoral counselors can catalyze Christiformity through applying “additional redemptive resources (e.g., the Holy Spirit, divine forgiveness and so on)” with other counseling resources found in various schools of thought.¹²⁰ In other words, the pastoral counselor who brings theological truths to bear in counseling can help the client to

¹¹⁷ John Stott, *The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 70.

¹¹⁸ Johnson, 567.

¹¹⁹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1143.

¹²⁰ Johnson, 570.

understand and reflect on who God is, what God has done for them in Christ, how the Holy Spirit is present in their life, etc. An application of these theological truths by the pastoral counselor to the client can give them a starting point for reflection on God and His word as it relates to all aspects of their life, especially areas in which they feel wounded and unable to understand how they can be loved. When this occurs, the client can experience Christiformity, and grow as a maturing Christian.

Whenever pastoral counselors employ biblical wisdom in their practice, such as being quick to hear and slow to speak, using wisdom to speak healing, encouraging the fainthearted, and applying theological truths to encourage Christiformity, the divine healing power of the Gospel is made available to the client. While the healing of the client ultimately comes from God, the pastoral counselor who does this joins together with God in bringing about healing, which is what Christ promised that the church would accomplish. Whatever healing that is brought about through pastoral counseling is incomplete though, because the perfect healing of God's people will occur when Christ returns. However, this healing is a picture of what is to come. It could seem that this should be done through the clergy, but there is a strong theological basis for this to be practiced by lay people.

Theological Basis for Lay Pastoral Counseling

A common thought among evangelical Christians is that ministry is done by clergy, while lay congregants should merely sit and receive what their leadership has to offer. Ephesians 4:11-12 challenges this idea by saying that the purpose of church leaders (i.e. apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers) is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry," so that the church can be built up. Bruce notes that the giftings mentioned here are not meant to have a monopoly on the ministry of the church. Instead, they direct the congregants into performing a multitude of

ministries.¹²¹ This include pastoral counseling. Rather than performing all of the duties of pastoral counseling, the leadership of the church is given the directive to equip lay congregants to provide pastoral counseling services. When this occurs, the church is built up because the lay congregants who would otherwise remain passive begin ministering to the needy within the congregation, and those who need pastoral counseling services have access to them through the laity.

To strengthen this argument further, an analysis of 1st Thessalonians 5:14's context shows not only why pastoral counseling can be practiced by the laity, but why it should be practiced by the laity. As mentioned before, this paragraph urges believers to “encourage the fainthearted.” Pastoral counseling is one of the ways that the fainthearted can be encouraged—by nature it facilitates encouragement for believers who are struggling. It is important to note that this passage is written for lay people. The verse begins with “And we urge you, brothers...” because it is written to all of the believers in the church. Shogren explains that “brothers” is “speaking to Christians in general.”¹²² The instruction of Paul to “encourage the “fainthearted” is specifically given to the entire church—not just the clergy. Whenever lay believers provide pastoral counseling services, even for minor issues, they are participating in their calling as Christians to care for each other.

There is a strong biblical mandate for lay Christians to serve each other in a variety of ways, and pastoral counseling is one of them. When lay Christians are equipped to provide pastoral counseling services, they are empowered to catalyze healing in those whom they

¹²¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: a Verse-by-Verse Exposition* (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, 1977).

¹²² Gary Shogren, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 221.

counsel. This enables them to serve by bringing the healing power of the Gospel to bear in the lives of those who may be struggling.

Conclusion

The practice of pastoral counseling is a powerful ministry that has the potential to catalyze healing for those who are spiritually wounded. While that healing will be fully perfected at Christ's return, pastoral counselors have the opportunity to co-labor with God to bring about a picture of this eternal healing through their craft. Through embodying biblical ideals and pointing the clients to spiritual truths of the Gospel, pastoral counselors can enable their clients to become more like Christ by growing in their spiritual maturity. Though it is tempting to write off pastoral counseling as something that is done only by the clergy, the reality is that there is a strong biblical warrant for training lay Christians in this craft so that the body of Christ can be built up. This warrants creating a program for training lay congregants in pastoral counseling. The mechanics of this training program will be explored in the next section.

Theoretical Foundations

Training lay pastoral counselors is a task that has been taken up by numerous parties. There are several training programs that have been created, each with their unique approach. These programs include the Association of Biblical Counselor's Equipped to Counsel, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselor's Counseling Discipleship Training (CDT), as well as the Biblical Counseling Center's Lay Counseling Certificate Program. In order to successfully create a six-week program from training lay pastoral counselors, elements from these will be analyzed, and when beneficial, synthesized. In doing so, this program will rival the training in pastoral counseling found at many evangelical seminaries.

The Association of Biblical Counselor's Equipped to Counsel program is an in-depth approach to training lay pastoral counselors, specifically within the framework of biblical counseling. Its textbook contains twenty-four chapters, and is designed to be studied in an interactive class setting. If the class studies one chapter a week, then this curriculum takes approximately five months to successfully complete. It is an extremely in-depth curriculum, which covers the fundamentals of biblical counseling, as well as specific focuses such as addiction, anger, marriage, and family counseling.¹²³ When this curriculum is put in practice in the classroom setting, there are typically accompanying activities such as counseling role-play, relevant case studies, and whole-group discussions.¹²⁴ It should be noted that biblical counseling, especially as taught in this curriculum, is distinct from (though similar to) the pastoral counseling framework employed by this thesis project. This curriculum clearly rejects any secular sources in developing a counseling model, whereas this thesis project allows for secular sources to influence its model. Regardless, the Equipped to Counsel curriculum is viewed with high regard in the world of pastoral counseling. Over the course of twenty-four weeks, this program builds a sturdy foundation for lay pastoral counselors to practice from.

Meanwhile, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, which offers biblical counseling training in a variety of formats, routinely hosts Counseling Discipleship Training (CDT) seminars. These seminars, which are hosted regionally, make training in biblical pastoral counseling available to laypeople without requiring them to go through their standard certification process. A typical seminar is hosted at a church or a seminary, involves one or

¹²³ John Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel: A Training Program in Biblical Counseling, Leader Notebook* (Mustang, OK: Association of Biblical Counselors, 2008).

¹²⁴ "Equipped to Counsel Training Course," Counseling, August 19, 2020, <https://counseling.dentonbible.org/equipped-to-counsel-training-course/>.

multiple lecturers, and takes place over three weekends. The schedule for a typical CDT seminar may be from 5:00 PM – 9:45 PM on a Friday evening, and then from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM the following Saturday, for three weekends – one weekend over each consecutive month. The participants would pay a registration fee between \$195 and \$225 to cover the costs of the seminar.¹²⁵ While open for biblical counselors who are certified by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, CDT seminars are designed to develop foundational skills in biblical counseling for laypeople so that they can provide lay pastoral counseling services in their own church context.

In conjunction with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, the Biblical Counseling Center offers the Lay Counseling Certificate Program, which is an extensive program that is designed to be completed online. Like Equipped to Counsel, the Lay Counseling Certificate Program is an extremely in-depth curriculum. It has sixty video-based lessons, and it includes access to a team of experienced counselors for personalized insight. This program, which takes about a year to complete, includes a foundations of biblical counseling element, analysis of actual counseling sessions, and a study of contemporary issues in biblical counseling. The convenience of its online delivery is matched by an in-depth study of several facets of lay biblical counseling.

In order to adequately develop a lay pastoral training program, these three programs have helpful elements that can be synthesized. The Equipped to Counsel program, for instance, builds a sturdy framework for training lay pastoral counselors through analyzing significant aspects of pastoral counseling. It is broken down into three sections: Foundations of Biblical Counseling, Biblical Counseling and Specific Troubles (anxiety, depression, etc.), and Biblical Counseling

¹²⁵ “ACBC Regional Events: Counseling Discipleship Training,” Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, August 3, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/training-2/acbc-regional-events/>.

and the Family.¹²⁶ To develop a solid framework for pastoral counseling, two of these three elements will be explored by the six-week lay pastoral training program: foundations of counseling and specific troubles.

While the Counseling Discipleship Training seminar program also delivers helpful content, it notably embraces a low-commitment format. Rather than committing to weekly classes for five months for the Equipped to Counsel program, or a year of online classes for the Lay Counseling Certificate Program, CDT seminars typically only require six days of training – two days at a time over three months. This lesser time commitment makes CDT seminars more ideal for those who want training in lay pastoral counseling, but may not be able to commit to classes over several months like the other two options. For some, these are more accessible. With the lower time commitment in mind, this lay pastoral training program is specifically designed to be completed in a short amount of time. With only six meetings required over the course of six weeks, this program seeks to be accessible to those who may not be able to commit for several months.

The Lay Counseling Certificate Program, meanwhile, may be viewed by some as being more accessible than the other two programs. This is not because of its length, however, but its format. While it takes approximately one year to complete, this program is made completely accessible through an entirely online delivery. Through making its contents accessible online, those who are not able to attend an in-person counseling class would still be able to access training in lay pastoral counseling through its online format. In order to ensure the accessibility of this six-week lay pastoral training program it will also be made available in an online format. As previously stated, its six meetings will be held over the Zoom videoconferencing platform.

¹²⁶ John Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel*.

Like the Lay Counseling Certificate Program, this course will be accessible through an online approach.

The fact that this introductory pastoral counseling training program will only be six weeks long and entirely online could lead an individual to question the effectiveness of the methodology. For the sake of convenience, one may argue that this program sacrifices adequacy. In order for a pastoral counseling training program to be truly beneficial, this argument would say that it should be much more extensive than this. While a more thorough training would certainly benefit those who take this course, it should be noted that there are many evangelical pastors who either receive just an introductory training in pastoral counseling, or no training in it during their seminary education, and yet they are at the front line of many pastoral counseling cases.

The standard course of study for ministry preparation in the seminary context is the Master of Divinity degree. This is because it covers a broad range of theological disciplines, such as biblical languages, historic and systematic theology, biblical interpretation, and practical ministry, among others. For these reasons, seminary president Jason Allen refers to the Master of Divinity as “the gold standard for ministry preparation.”¹²⁷ With such a strong reputation, one would assume that extensive training in pastoral counseling would be mandatory in the Master of Divinity course of study, especially when the necessity of pastoral counseling in the church context is considered. However, this is not always the case. A brief survey of the Master of

¹²⁷ Jason Allen, “Recovering the Master of Divinity Degree,” April 10, 2016, <https://jasonkallen.com/2016/04/recovering-the-master-of-divinity-degree/>.

Divinity program at the six seminaries supported by the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program¹²⁸ sheds light on this matter.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program supports the following six seminaries: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS), Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), and Gateway Seminary (GS). There are numerous evangelical pastors who receive their ministry training through these six seminaries. Surprisingly, only half of these require pastoral (or biblical) counseling as part of their course of study for the Master of Divinity. As it currently stands, NOBTS,¹²⁹ SWBTS,¹³⁰ and MBTS¹³¹ do not require a pastoral counseling course as part of this degree. Meanwhile, SBTS,¹³² GS,¹³³ and SEBTS¹³⁴ require only an introductory course in pastoral (or biblical) counseling that can be completed online in eight weeks. Despite this, many

¹²⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, "Theological Seminaries," SBC.net, accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.sbc.net/resources/directories/theological-seminaries/>.

¹²⁹ Damian Dulisz, "Master of Divinity Standard Course Catalog," New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Catalog, accessed December 13, 2020, <https://catalog.nobts.edu/graduate/masters/degrees/divinity/divinity>.

¹³⁰ SWBTS, "Master of Divinity - Catalog," Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 13, 2020, <http://catalog.swbts.edu/school-of-theology/master-of-divinity/>.

¹³¹ "MDiv (Master of Divinity) - Standard Program: MBTS," Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.mbts.edu/degrees/masters-studies/mdiv/>.

¹³² "Master of Divinity - The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," Billy Graham School, September 22, 2020, <https://www.sbts.edu/bgs/degree-programs/mdiv/leadership-and-discipleship/>.

¹³³ "Gateway Seminary - Academic Catalog, 2020-2021," Gateway Seminary, accessed December 13, 2020, https://07fbc0072181791bed1-63fc6f11b2ad7905e74d76d8e23a9e05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/2/0e10526858_1601418410_2020-2021-academic-catalog-final.pdf#page=62, 56.

¹³⁴ "Academic Catalog 2020-2021," Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 13, 2020, http://catalog.sebts.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=17.

of the graduates of these seminaries go on to pastor churches, and with pastoring, comes pastoral counseling, despite a thorough course of study in this discipline.

While there are strong advantages to having a seminary education in pastoral counseling, the point stands that many seminary-trained evangelical pastors have either an introduction to counseling, or no training at all in it. For this reason, it is understandable to offer a six-week training course in pastoral counseling that is available online. This course is specifically designed to introduce its participants to fundamental aspects of pastoral counseling in an accessible format, so that it is broadly accessible to the standard lay congregant. While this course is not going to compare to the rigor of a graduate-level course in pastoral counseling, it will have similar concepts to what may be present in a seminary class.

In order to create a lay pastoral training program that is both effective and accessible, this program has synthesized elements from the aforementioned pastoral counseling training programs. The content has been influenced by the Equipped to Counsel program, while the accessible format was influenced by both the Counseling Discipleship Training and the Lay Counseling Certificate Program. Through doing this, the program provides an introduction to pastoral counseling that could be compared to what many pastors received during their time in seminary in terms of length. This preparatory program will provide its participants an introduction to pastoral counseling that will prepare them to counsel individuals with minor issues, and enables them continue developing their skills in pastoral counseling in the future.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Based upon prior research regarding lay pastoral counseling, the methodological approach for this project involved the researcher developing an intervention design, and implementing the intervention design at C3 Denton. This intervention design was constructed and implemented to ensure that the researcher could gather adequate data to determine the success of this thesis project.

Intervention Design

As previously noted, the purpose of this study was to provide a training program for the congregants at C3 Denton to develop foundational skills required to adequately provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to their peers who have minor counseling needs. The intervention design for this research project involved three essential elements: recruiting and interviewing potential candidates for the study, teaching the six-week class on lay-level pastoral counseling, and conducting post-class interviews of those who participated in the study. Through doing this, the researcher expected the participants in this study to develop a foundational understanding of lay-level pastoral counseling, and have the ability to apply these newly formed skills by providing lay-level pastoral counseling services on a volunteer basis to individuals at C3 Denton who would benefit from counseling for minor needs.

Recruiting and Interviewing Potential Candidates

The first step of this research project involved recruiting potential candidates for the study. Recruitment did not begin until the researcher secured approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin. The recruitment for this study occurred in the context

of C3 Denton’s parish¹³⁵ meetings, as well as through informal conversations. The researcher met with each parish leader during the Sunday morning fellowship times – before and after the Sunday worship service. The researcher informed them of the study, the need for participants, and requested that they aid in the recruitment process through announcing the study to their parish members at the weekly meeting.

After the researcher secured approval from IRB, each parish leader was provided a script to read to their parish in the form of an announcement. The script read:

Have you ever had a friend who was going through a hard time, and you wanted to support them but didn’t know how to talk to them about it? Maybe your friend experienced some type of trauma, or a mental illness like depression or anxiety, and you didn’t know if your words were helpful? If this is you, would you like the chance to develop your counseling skills? Ryan Ladner is doing a study on counseling skills, and as part of his study, he is going to be teaching Applying Hope, which is a six-week class on developing those skills. He is looking for ten participants in this study. If you would be interested in participating in this study and going through his six-week class on counseling, reach out to him at XXX-XXX-XXXX.¹³⁶

After potential candidates responded to the parish announcement or informal conversations, the researcher began conducting interviews to determine who met the criteria for participating in this study. In the event that ten individuals did not respond, the researcher intended personally reach out to individuals in the congregation who may be interested in participating. The criteria for participating in this study was that the candidate

1. Is at least 18 years of age
2. Regularly attends Sunday morning services at C3 Denton
3. Is actively involved with a parish

¹³⁵ C3 Denton has several community groups that meet on a weekly basis. Each group is known as a “parish”, due to their geographical focus. Parishes are strategically located in various neighborhoods throughout the city so that they can systematically reach the city of Denton with ministries that are highly localized.

¹³⁶ The researcher’s phone number is intentionally retracted from this report, but will be present in the announcement script.

4. Has not received formal training in lay-level pastoral counseling
5. Has a desire to develop foundational skills in lay-level pastoral counseling
6. Would provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to congregants of C3 Denton on a volunteer basis after they have developed the skills required to adequately provide this service
7. Is willing to participate in the Applying Hope class, a six-week curriculum designed to develop lay-level pastoral counseling skills on Wednesday evenings from 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM, beginning January 6th, 2021, ending on February 10th, 2021

The researcher determined if potential candidates met these criteria through conducting phone interviews. He responded to each potential candidate who reached out with interest in the study after the parish announcement and set up a phone interview. During the phone interview, the researcher explained the nature of this study, why the study was being conducted, and asked if the potential candidates met each of the seven criteria required to participate in this study. If the candidate met all of these criteria and were willing to participate in this study, the researcher considered them as a potential participant. If there were more than ten individuals who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study, then the researcher would choose ten individuals from the list at his discretion. These phone interviews took no more than two weeks to complete.

After the ten individuals were selected, they were contacted through text message and informed that they had been chosen to participate in this study. The researcher discussed with each participant what this study would entail, and discussed any concerns that they may have had. The researcher then created an Applying Hope GroupMe¹³⁷ chat which included all ten of

¹³⁷ GroupMe is a group messaging app that is commonly used by ministries at C3 Denton to promote communicate among its groups.

the participants, and used the GroupMe chat to answer further questions, and remind the participants of the class before it began.

Teaching the Applying Hope Class

Beginning Wednesday, January 6th, 2021, the Applying Hope class began. It took place on January 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th, February 3rd, and 10th. The class began at 7:00 PM, and continued until 8:30 PM each week. The medium for this class was the Zoom video conferencing platform.¹³⁸ The researcher created a repeating meeting for Applying Hope, which generated a link, Meeting ID, and a passcode. The links, Meeting ID's, and passcodes were the same for each meeting. The researcher posted this information in the GroupMe app three days before the class began.

To adequately build the foundational skills required for performing lay-level pastoral counseling, the weekly classes sought to answer an essential question. The following list contains the essential questions for each week, as well as a brief explanation of what the student were expected to learn.

Week 1) What is lay-level pastoral counseling?

- Defining lay-level counseling
- Defining pastoral counseling
- Framework for counseling

Week 2) How do I develop my counseling technique?

- Innate Self-Actualization
- Unconditional Positive Regard

¹³⁸ While it would have been possible safely to host this class in-person while requiring masks and social distancing per CDC guidelines, out of an abundance of caution, C3 Denton has opted to host similar non-Sunday morning gatherings solely online. The online format of Applying Hope is in line with the precedent that has been set.

- Empathetic Response

Week 3) How can I counsel someone struggling with a minor addiction?

- Defining minor addiction
- Common minor addictions (tobacco, alcohol, sex/pornography, substances)
- The multi-faceted effect of addictions

Week 4) How can I counsel someone struggling with a minor, common mental illness?

- Defining mental illness, including minor mental illness
- Common mental illnesses (depression, anxiety)
- The multi-faceted effect of mental illnesses

Week 5) How can I counsel somebody who has minor trauma?

- Defining trauma, including minor trauma
- Common forms of trauma (childhood trauma, tragic accidents)
- The multi-faceted effect of trauma

Week 6) How can I employ boundaries, contingency plans, and community referrals?

- The necessity and definition of boundaries in counseling
- Suicidal ideations, threats, and attempts
- When, how, and who to refer – helpful organizations in the community

With the exception of the final week, each class proceeded on the same schedule, employing four specific components: introductory prayer and discussion question, lecture, practice, and concluding thoughts and prayer. The first five classes adhered to the following schedule:

- 1) Introductory prayer and discussion question – 7:00-7:15 PM

- Researcher asks a participant to open class with a word of prayer, then poses a prepared question to the group that relates to the week's subject, connects to prior knowledge, and generates discussion among the participants
- 2) Lecture – 7:15-7:45 PM
- Researcher shares a lecture that explains the various aspects of the week's subject, using a pre-made PowerPoint Presentation as a guide, with the Zoom Screen Share feature enabled
- 3) Practice – 7:45-8:15 PM
- Researcher gives hypothetical counseling scenarios to participants, uses the Zoom Breakout Room feature to pair participants up, and participants practice counseling each other through these hypothetical scenarios, employing what was discussed in the lecture component to guide the counseling
- 4) Concluding thoughts and prayer – 8:15-8:30 PM
- Researcher ends the Zoom Breakout Rooms, joins the participants back into the larger group, asks the participants to share their thoughts from the practical counseling session, shares some final thoughts, and asks a participant to close in prayer

During the sixth (and final) class session, the schedule was altered to account for an extended lecture session. The practice counseling session from 7:45-8:15 was replaced with an extended lecture.

The classes continued in this format for six weeks. At the end of six weeks, the participants had engaged in a significant level of prayer, discussion, instruction, and practice related to lay-level pastoral counseling. Theoretically speaking, this should have developed their ability to engage in this form of counseling, and those who participated in this class were well-

equipped to provide their services to congregants of C3 Denton who would be able to benefit from them.

Conducting Post-Class Interviews

After the final meeting, the researcher began reaching out to each individual who participated in this study to conduct a post-class interview. These interviews began the day after the final meeting, and were completed two weeks from when the class ended. The post-class interviews were designed to gauge the level of growth, if any, experienced by the participants in their pastoral counseling skills. They were also designed to help the researcher understand if the participants felt prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to other congregants at C3 Denton.

The interviews were conducted over the phone, and in them, the researcher asked the following open-ended questions, and recorded the responses of the participants as they were being interviewed.

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?
2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?
3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?
4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?
5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to more about?
6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?
 - A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?
 - B. If no, could you explain why you did not discern any growth?
7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody

you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

B. If no, are there any other factors, such as more training, that would help you feel more prepared to do this?

Once these post-class interviews were completed and recorded for each participant, the researcher analyzed the data to determine if this research project was a success.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The implementation of the intervention design was a ten-week process which involved three essential elements: recruiting and interviewing potential candidates, teaching the class, and conducting post-class interviews. The first portion took two weeks, the second portion took six weeks, and the third portion took two additional weeks. In addition to these three elements, the researcher conducted an interview with an expert in this field after the post-class interviews were conducted. During this time, the researcher gained all of the data required to determine the success of this project.

Recruiting and Interviewing

The recruiting and interviewing process for the Applying Hope formally began on Sunday, December 13th, 2020, continued until Saturday, December 20th, 2020, paused for the week of December 21st – December 27th for Christmas holidays, and was completed the next week, December 27th, 2020 – January 2th, 2021. Due to informal conversations that took place before the recruitment period,¹³⁹ six individuals approached the researcher and asked to be

¹³⁹ The researcher began working on this thesis project in July of 2020, and throughout this time, occasionally communicated informally with peers at C3 Denton that this class would occur. As a result of these informal communications, interest in this class had already been generated before the formal recruitment period had begun.

considered for this class. An announcement was made in a parish meeting about this class, and four more people inquired. At this point, the researcher began his interviews to ensure that the candidates were eligible to be part of this study.

During the phone interview stage, the researcher called each of these ten participants, and asked them the following questions regarding eligibility:

1. Are you at least 18 years of age?
2. Do you regularly attend Sunday morning services at C3 Denton?
3. Are you actively involved with a parish?
4. Have you received formal training in lay-level pastoral counseling?
5. Do you have a desire to develop foundational skills in lay-level pastoral counseling?
6. Would you provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to congregants of C3 Denton on a volunteer basis after you have developed the skills required to adequately provide this service?
7. Are you willing to participate in the Applying Hope class, a six-week curriculum designed to develop lay-level pastoral counseling skills on Wednesday evenings from 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM, beginning January 6th, 2021, ending on February 10^h, 2021?

All ten of the potential candidates answered “Yes” to questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7; they all answered “No” to question 4. Each potential candidate was deemed eligible to participate in the study, and take the Applying Hope class.

Teaching Applying Hope

Applying Hope’s six-week class began on Wednesday, January 6th, 2021, and continued weekly on Wednesday evenings until Wednesday, February 10th, 2021. The class occurred through the Zoom videoconferencing platform from 7:00 PM until 8:30 PM. In order to ensure

effective communication between the researcher and participants, the researcher created a group messaging thread through GroupMe, where he communicated the details for the Zoom meetings before each meeting occurred.

Session 1: What is lay-level pastoral counseling?

For the first session on January 6th, the focus was on introducing the concept of lay-level pastoral counseling, defining what it is, and developing a framework for counseling. The session began with a discussion question related to the necessity of counseling training, before going into a lecture on definitions of lay-pastoral counseling, and a counseling framework. The framework for counseling involved active listening as a fundamental component, which was introduced during this session. After the lecture, the participants were assigned breakout rooms where one participant role-played a hypothetical struggle while the other was tasked with active listening, and the role switched after fifteen minutes. When the breakout room time was completed, the participants came back for concluding thoughts and a closing prayer.

Session 2: How do I develop my counseling technique?

For the second session on January 13th, the focus was on developing a counseling technique, which involved a biblical and theoretical synthesis of innate self-actualization, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic response. The session began with a discussion question related to the characteristics of a good counselor, before going into a lecture on biblical and theoretical conceptions of counseling technique. Again, the technique involved active listening as a fundamental component, so this concept was reviewed. After the lecture, the participants were assigned breakout rooms where one participant role-played a hypothetical struggle while the other was tasked with active listening and counseling, and the role switched

after fifteen minutes. When the breakout room time was completed, the participants came back for concluding thoughts and a closing prayer.

Session 3: How can I counsel someone struggling with a minor addiction?

For the third session on January 20th, the focus was on applying a counseling technique to minor addictions, such as tobacco and pornography addiction. The session began with a discussion question related to addiction where the participants shared about their own experiences with addiction, before going into a lecture on biblical and theoretical conceptions of addiction and addiction counseling from the lay pastoral perspective. After the lecture, the participants were assigned breakout rooms where one participant role-played a hypothetical addiction-related struggle while the other was tasked with active listening and counseling, and the role switched after fifteen minutes. When the breakout room time was completed, the participants came back for concluding thoughts and a closing prayer.

Session 4: How can I counsel someone struggling with a minor, common mental illness?

For the fourth session on January 27th, the focus was on applying a counseling technique to minor, common mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety. The session began with a discussion related to mental illnesses where the participants shared about their own struggles related to mental illness, before going into a lecture on biblical and theoretical conceptions of mental illness and mental illness counseling from the lay pastoral perspective. After the lecture, the participants were assigned breakout rooms where one participant role-played a hypothetical mental illness-related struggle while the other was tasked with active listening and counseling, and the role switched after fifteen minutes. When the breakout room time was completed, the participants came back for concluding thoughts and a closing prayer.

Session 5: How can I counsel somebody who has minor trauma?

For the fifth session on February 3rd, the focus was on applying a counseling technique to victims of minor trauma. The session began with a discussion question related to trauma where the participant shared about their own struggles related to trauma, before going into a lecture on biblical and theoretical conceptions of trauma and trauma counseling from the lay pastoral perspective. After the lecture, the participants were assigned breakout rooms where one participant role-played a hypothetical trauma-related struggle while the other was tasked with active listening, and the role switched after fifteen minutes. When the breakout room time was completed, the participants came back for concluding thoughts and a closing prayer.

Session 6: How can I employ boundaries, contingency plans, and community referrals?

For the sixth session on February 10th, the focus was on wrapping up the class with a focus on boundaries, contingency plans, and community referrals. The session began with a discussion question related to the necessity of boundaries, and went into a lecture that covered the three aforementioned topics. With regards to community referrals, the researcher went over a document outlining a number of counseling-related agencies in the greater Denton area which offer services at a free or reduced rate. For the contingency plan aspect, the researcher discussed contingency plans to put in place for individuals with active suicidal ideations. Created in collaboration with a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), the contingency plan involved breaking confidentiality to ensure the safety of the client by pursuing emergency treatment at a specified facility in the Denton area. After the lecture was concluded, a brief recap of the last six weeks was conducted, participants shared final thoughts, before ending with a closing prayer.

Participant Drop-outs and Absences

Over the course of the study, a total of two participants dropped out due to unforeseen circumstances. Both of these occurred immediately before the first session. The two individuals

who dropped out of the study reached out to the researcher beforehand, and informed the researcher of new circumstances that would prevent them from participating.

Over the course of this study, there were a total of five absences. During the first session, one individual was absent due to work-related stresses. On the third week, two individuals were absent due to a conflicting schedule. On the fourth week, one individual was absent due to work-related stresses, and on the fifth week, one individual was absent due to a familial issue. Due to absences during the first and fifth weeks of the class, there were seven participants instead of eight. In order to ensure that each participant had a partner for the breakout rooms, on those two weeks, the researcher functioned as the counseling partner with one of the participants. In response to multiple absences on the third week, the researcher scheduled and taught a makeup session for the participants who missed that week on Tuesday, January 26th, 2021 at 6:30 PM. These participant drop-outs and absences fell within the limitations of this study, and did not negate its effectiveness.

Post-Class Phone Interviews

After the six-week class concluded, the researcher began the third phase of this research project: Collecting data from participants through phone interviews conducted after the class had concluded. These interviews, which took place over the course of two weeks, involved the researcher calling each participant and asking the following open-ended questions designed to gauge the level of growth in pastoral counseling skills and preparedness to provide pastoral counseling services:

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?
2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?
4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?
5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?
6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?
 - A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?
 - B. If no, could you explain why you did not discern any growth?
7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?
 - A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?
 - B. If no, are there any other factors, such as more training, that would help you feel more prepared to do this?

The following section contains the responses of the study participants to these questions. For the sake of anonymity, the participant’s names have been replaced with numbers 1-8.

Phone Interview: Participant 1

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“My favorite part of the class was basically learning about active listening, because as a single guy, the married guys had a heads up. Most of the married guys learned about it in pre-marital counseling. I’ve gone through counseling, and I’ve realized that in counseling, my counselor used active listening, so it was great to get to know what it is. It was also great to see the different points of view in counseling, and the definitions of mental illness and trauma and

how to help people as a lay counselor, and also learning how to pass them off when they need more help. Also, the suicide lesson was really great as well.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“I just really liked the parts where we go to open up and share our experiences about what the topic was. It helped us take what we learned in theory and relate it to real life.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“Yeah, the one about trauma where people start projecting trauma onto you, even though you’re not the cause of it. There was a girl who I was dating two years ago, and the relationship didn’t work out, but when the relationship crumbled, she revealed that she had been groomed and took out her anger on me about what had happened, and that was an AHA moment. I thought that I did something really bad in that relationship, but it came out that I didn’t do anything – the person who abused her had passed away and she didn’t have the chance to come to grips about it, and she projected on me. It helped me make the connection about what had really happened. I had some relief, when I realized that I didn’t do anything wrong. Also, when you said that “hurting people hurt people” made a lot of sense. She had several years of abuse in her past, so that made me realize why she acted like that towards me.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“When we always did the active listening thing, for every guy that I was with, I tried to follow what you said to give a little, and let them dig it out... A lot of times they would just start spewing everything out instead of giving us the chance to dig it out. The prompts that you gave, they give people the chance to use the method that you’re trying to teach, when somebody shared

something that had happened to them, they would give an ongoing story, instead of giving the other person the chance to use the tools. More scenario-based prompts would make it better.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“I would like to learn about helping people who’ve been through sexual abuse and trauma. That’s something I’ve been through before, and I didn’t know how to help them. Some more lay level training in that regard would be awesome.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“Yes”

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“Basically, I look back at my past experiences in counseling, and I didn’t have the tools that you talked about with active listening. I always wanted to talk and instantly solve the problems. It was my need to talk and express myself. After taking this course and learning about active listening, I got a lot of tools that were missing, which opened up my eyes to how I can better help people in the future. I basically gained more essential tools that I needed but I didn’t have.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“Yes”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“Really I would just want to meet with the person, get to know them more, especially if they’re someone I’m not too familiar with. I would meet with them, talk to them, and let them be heard. In my past when I’ve done counseling, I didn’t want people to fix things, I just wanted to

talk. Now I would want to let them be heard, and let them know that I'm listening to them, that I'm there with them, and that I care about them."

Phone Interview: Participant 2

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

"Having people on Zoom. I enjoyed it being on Zoom."

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

"Our last one – referrals, contingency plans, and boundaries. I really enjoyed the boundaries aspect."

3. Did you have any "Lightbulb" or "Ah-ha!" moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

"The lightbulb moment happened when we did the boundaries and referrals session. By not getting in too deep, and having other outlets to help other people, developing support for this ministry. In other words, you can't do it all yourself."

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

"More input from the students, and less lecture from the teacher. You don't have to take offense to it, but that would make people more attentive and understanding, so that everyone will get more out of class. For example, having people read things instead of you reading them."

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

"Mental illness. The better ways to help others not only understand mental illness and cope with situations that can arise with mental illness."

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

"Yes."

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“The main thing was the boundaries. Realizing that you can’t help everybody, and having the freedom to say “I can’t help you but maybe I can find someone who can.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“Yes. More than likely it would depend on who it is, but more than likely, yes. If they see me that way and are bold enough to ask me, then yes. I would love to listen to them and see how I can help. I’ve been told that I’m a pretty good listener.”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“The main approach would be to get 1-on-1 in person. And then I would listen, first. I would ask probing questions, and let them know I’m there for them. The main thrust is to say “I can’t give you advice, I’m here as a backboard to help you reflect on what is going on.”

Phone Interview: Participant 3

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“I thought that for how difficult it is to get a bunch of people together to learn something over Zoom, this was very easy to follow and understand. The course was very practical, and well thought out in an easy to follow format.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“I think that the active listening was a huge part, but there were lots of things. Learning about all the different ways that active listening is applied to different kinds of counseling subjects and tailoring it to different types of issues such as addictions or mental disorders was really helpful. Applying active listening through the lens of mental disorders, trauma and addictions was really great and helpful.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“I think that there was one during the addiction portion. It had to do with addiction being a type of sin, when you used Romans 7 to display addiction biblically. That clicked for me really well. I also think that the analogy you used for someone who smokes a lot tends to have the mannerisms and patterns related to smoking. It helped me understand addiction from a completely different angle. As an ex-smoker, applying that analogy to myself was helpful for understanding my tendency with addiction, which helps me know how to counsel others struggling with addiction.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“Here’s the one thing I was hoping for: Active listening is definitely a lot of counsel, but I was really looking forward to some sort of application of applying biblical truth. I wanted a little more intention and practicality in counseling.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“Probably developing a practical plan of application, like I mentioned before.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“Oh sure, definitely.”

- A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“I think I just applied some of the contents to myself and my own circumstances, and applying the contents to how I approach other relationships has made it easier to relate. It makes it much easier to talk to somebody who has been through difficult times. It has also made it easier to discern when I am not using the tools for counseling.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody

you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“Yes, I would feel comfortable. It’s definitely something that you’ve helped us out with.”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“I would probably set up a time to meet them up at the church or something like that, ask them about what’s going on, hear from them, and probably take it in and I’m assuming that they’ve got something they want to share. I would do active listening, ask questions, and try to understand what’s going on.”

Phone Interview: Participant 4

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“My favorite part of the class was the informative psycho-educational definitions and explanations of all of the different mental illness, trauma, addiction, active listening. Also, the compassionate attitudes of everybody listening and expressing themselves.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“I think what stuck out to me the most was us being able to practice on each other with active listening at the end of each session for a good amount of time.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“I did. The biblical reference to God working all things out in regards to trauma was helpful for me because of my past, and was a great tool for me to use in counseling. The biblical support in the trauma session was great. Also in the trauma session, I really liked the metaphors and self-disclosure that you used when you talked about someone can tap you on the shoulder

and it trigger you, leading to a full-fledged flashback. It was cool to hear all of the different personal trauma stories and apply it to what we were learning in the class.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“A worst-case scenario for preparation, encouraging critical thinking for if they came up. It may be too soon for this basic level class, but a critical thinking session to get us thinking about intense examples. Also, a sheet of biblical examples of topics to refer to as a handout.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“Well that’s a really funny question for me. I want to say everything that I don’t know, I want to know. I know that’s really broad, but it’s the truth. Everything I didn’t learn, I want to know.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“Yes.”

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“Me being able to take active listening skills and apply them to real world scenarios, such as my own personal relationships. This has been helping me not focus on fixing problems. This has helped me be more concerned and grateful, instead of being frustrated when people come to me with problems. Also, I had a spontaneous lay-counseling session this past week, and got to put some of those strategies into action.?”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“Yes, on an informal basis. It depends on the situation, though. If it is too severe, I would refer them out, but I would use my lay-counseling skills to do that.”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“It depends on how they come up to me. If they came up to me, I would have a very structured approach. I would give them immediate support, praying for them. I would make sure that we have each other’s phone numbers, and set up a day each week to connect and have a weekly check-in. I would talk with them however long they need that day. I would also let them know that they can text me or message me throughout the week.”

Phone Interview: Participant 5

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“My favorite part was learning about active listening, how to do it, and how it benefits conversations.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“What stuck out to me the most was the mix of it being very normal, secular counseling mixed with religious counseling.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“Not many lightbulb moments for me, because I had talked about many of these concepts in couples counseling with my fiancé.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“For me, I would have wanted to go deeper in the area of trauma. But I also know that would have been difficult because of how short that the class is.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“I would like to learn more about working with people who are suicidal. I’ve had friends who were suicidal in the past and I didn’t approach it in the proper manner.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“Yes.”

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“Active listening, I’ve realized that I need to do that more in my relationships, with my fiancé, and in counseling.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“I would feel comfortable approaching it.

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“I may not feel comfortable immediately with doing it, but I feel much more comfortable now than I did before this class. I would start with informal counseling, by making myself available to talk and use active listening.”

Phone Interview: Participant 6

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“My favorite part of this class was probably the one-on-one interactions with the people, getting the information, and immediately practicing it. Putting it into play as soon as we talked about it helped me understand it.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“Probably the active listening part – it was bed-rocked into the entire course. Of course, the grounding of the Gospel, but using active listening to ground our counseling in the Gospel stuck out to me the most.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“I liked the statement that you said that “When you’ve experienced one mental illness some say you’ve experienced them all, but in reality, if you’ve experienced one mental illness you’ve experienced one.” This made me realize that when I deal with people who have struggled with mental illness, I shouldn’t categorize them and put them in a box, but consider each person’s uniqueness in my counseling of them.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“I really liked learning about addictions, especially porn addiction. That should have had its own class, because it’s just such a common issue. I know that I have struggled with that addiction a lot in my life, and I know so many people who are struggling with it as well.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“That’s a good question. I guess that in my own experience of counseling, I have been presented with exercises where my counselor wrote homework on a chalkboard. The exercises would focus on changing my thought processes, and I would do them on my own time. I would like a better understanding of exercises like those, and resources that I could use to help others even more.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“I think so.”

- A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“Entering this class, I was very inexperienced. During the first class I talked to R, and I was confused if I was doing the exercise right. But the more that we practiced, the more that the concept of active listening sank in and became more natural to me. After the class each week, I

would call my girlfriend and practiced active listening with her. Active listening as improved my life significantly, actually.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“I think so”

- A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“I think it depends on what I would be helping them with. I would look back to the concepts in this class, how I’ve had counseling in my class, keep up with them, talk to them at least once a week, and let them know that I am committed to their growth. I would focus it on the Gospel, instead of just their own change.”

Phone Interview: Participant 7

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“My favorite part was probably the level of participation that was included. Not just the answering questions, but the hands-on conversations that occurred. That is my preferred way to be taught things, which made me retain the information better.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“I would say that the idea that counseling is not always as formal as I have thought of it as. Counseling can place informally, and you do not need a professional license to do it. Practical help that you can give to somebody without the title of counselor is something that you do, and I can do it as well. This makes me want to take my relationships more seriously knowing that I can provide counseling on a lay level.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“The biggest lightbulb moment that I had was that active listening does not just apply to a spouse. Active listening can actually benefit non-marriage relationships. I learned that the benefit of active listening is really helpful when used in the context of a friendship, which can be applied to counseling them.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“I think that this class would be really awesome to do in person after Covid. Besides that, you could do one class with all guys, and one with all girls. That would make it more comfortable for some people if people knew they would be talking to the same gender.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“I find that trauma is something I would love to learn a little bit more about. I don’t believe that I have been through trauma in my own life, which I am grateful for; but I have definitely met people that have been through trauma, and I care about people who’ve been through trauma. Because of that I want to learn more about the psychological and spiritual elements of caring for them and responding to their trauma.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“I would say yes.”

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“I think that it was on a small scale, but as I tried to start applying the tactics that you taught us in the class in small ways with friends of mine, I saw a benefit to that.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel

prepared to provide those services?

“Yes, I would.”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“I think that if they came up to me at church, I would either find a place to chat at the church, or have them come over to my house. If it were a girl, I would want to get my wife involved. I would ask a lot of questions, and not try to say a lot of things. I would try to understand what was going on, get a feel for the level of counseling that’s needed, see if it’s something that I could do, and if not, refer them to a pastor or professional counselor.”

Phone Interview: Participant 8

1. What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?

“I would say that getting to learn more about and think about the ways that we can be reaching out to people. With everything that’s going on in the world, regarding how to teach the Gospel, being able to counsel people in severe trouble is more important than ever. Hearing about all of these different elements that play into counseling and wrestling with the implications has been really good.”

2. What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?

“I think that getting chances to talk with each other at the end of the classes and get real with each other was really great and stuck out to me. Getting the chance to apply everything.”

3. Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?

“Well I don’t think that there was a singular moment, but it was an overall taking in of things. I am a big picture digester of information, so for me, the closest that I would say was the moment we were talking about trauma. That was the most personal for me. For one moment, I

was saying to myself “That is what I went through with my divorce. It was pretty traumatic for me.” I realized that this was a big moment for me to sympathize with others who have been through similar difficult situations. Thinking about people blaming themselves, understand where they’re coming from, it helped me to relate my own experiences much deeper.”

4. If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?

“The only thing that comes to mind is super small potatoes. I think it’s mainly assuming particular issues. Instead of asking someone to volunteer to pray, calling on people to pray. Over Zoom, there are less visual cues, so if you were to teach the class over Zoom, that would make it less awkward. It’s tough on Zoom because you can’t see each other.”

5. What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?

“In terms from my own experience, counseling guys struggling with porn is a big one. That falls into addiction counseling, but it ties into multiple elements that aren’t always served by a standard addiction counseling. Another one might be learning about depression and anger – understanding the underlying issues, helping people see what’s under the surface, and talking about them.”

6. Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?

“Yes.”

A. If yes, could you explain how you discerned that growth?

“I would say that in the way I’ve been thinking about things. I’ve been thinking about others in a different light. It’s so much information to process that I can’t point to a singular thing, but I feel like I have been thinking more clearly about ministering more clearly to people in certain situations. Also, through conversations I’ve had with people talking about sensitive issues, the counseling strategies have come out in my speech.”

7. If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?

“Yes, unless it became clear that they needed to be referred to a professional.”

A. If yes, how would you approach this counseling?

“First I would find a comfortable time and place to talk, possible once a week or every other week. Also, I would talk to one of the pastors and let them know. I would give them some space to tell me what’s on their mind and heart, give them the chance to get stuff off of their chest, ask questions to guide them through it, understand what they’re talking about. We would also set some boundaries right off the gates.”

Expert Opinion

After the researcher conducted the post-class interviews, he conducted an interview with Dr. Ron Hughes, who has expertise in training lay pastoral counselors. The purpose of this interview was to aid the researcher in determining if this thesis project was a success, as well as glean wisdom on potential next steps for assisting the study participants moving into the practice of lay pastoral counseling. The results of this interview were promising, and aided the researcher in analyzing the data collected from the participants.

The interview began with the researcher explaining the nature and purpose of this study. To address the unmet need for pastoral counseling at C3 Denton, this study took a group of participants through a six-week course in lay-pastoral counseling in hopes that it would prepare them to begin providing their counseling services to fellow congregants at C3 Denton who have minor issues requiring pastoral counseling. This study was designed to develop a starting point

for counseling, the researcher noted, and aimed to equip its participants with fundamental skills so that they could begin counseling on the lay level.

The researcher went on to note that every participant who completed the class reported that they felt prepared to begin counseling in their post-class interview. Many of them noted that the focus on active listening skills effectively equipped them to listen to others in meaningful ways. Dr. Hughes felt like this may point to success in this project. The interview continued with the researcher discussing potential plans to develop a lay-counseling team using the participants of this study and annual repetitions of this class. Dr. Hughes gave constructive feedback for this process, and pointed the researcher to a variety of resources to aid in this process. Chapter five will discuss these potential plans at length.

Once this interview with Dr. Hughes concluded, the researcher had a fresh perspective on the data collected in this class, which assisted him in the analysis of it. Through discussing the contents of the class, post-class interview, and potential plans for developing a counseling ministry with an expert, the researcher completed the implementation of the methodology aspect of this thesis project.

Outline of How the Data will be Analyzed

Now that all of the data for this project has been collected, the researcher's next step will be to analyze all of the data. The data analysis process will involve a review of the requirements of success for this project, finding themes that repeatedly emerge among participant responses, determining the intended and unintended results of this project, before determining if this project was or was not a success. Through doing this, there will be a thorough analysis of the data, which will give the researcher a deeper grasp of the efficacy and successfulness of this thesis project. The data will be extensively analyzed in chapter four.

Recap of Methodology

The methodology for this thesis project involved the development and implementation of an intervention design. Focused on meeting the need for lay pastoral counselors at C3 Denton, this intervention design included recruiting study participants, teaching a class on lay pastoral counseling, interviewing each participant afterwards, and interviewing an expert in the field of pastoral counseling. Throughout this process, the researcher collected promising data regarding the efficacy of this thesis project, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

Over the course of ten weeks, the researcher conducted action research to determine if a six-week class in lay level pastoral counseling would prepare its participants to provide lay pastoral counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton. This ten-week process involved recruiting participants, teaching the class, and conducting post-class interviews with each participant. These ten weeks of action research were preceded by six months of academic research focused on identifying the need for lay-level pastoral counseling at C3 Denton and analyzing how a six-week class could meet this need.

At this point, the question must be raised: Was this action research project a success? Did the researcher succeed in equipping a group of individuals for the task of lay counseling? A cursory analysis of the data would make it seem so. Every single participant in this project reported positive results. Through analyzing the data from the post-class interviews, it seems that this Doctor of Ministry action research thesis project was a success because each participant reported feeling like they had been prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton that are experiencing minor issues. The contents of this chapter will be focused on breaking down and analyzing the data from these interviews, and determining the success of this project.

Data Gathered and Analyzed

Review of Requirements for Success

Before analyzing the data, it is warranted to recap what this thesis project sought to achieve. In chapter one of this thesis, the researcher noted a growing need for pastoral counseling

in churches today, including C3 Denton. While the pastoral staff may be equipped to provide pastoral counseling services, other ministerial duties take away from their ability to provide those services to the church community adequately. Meanwhile, some lay congregants attend C3 Denton that may be able to provide lay-level counseling services but have not received an appropriate level of training. If that training were provided to some of the lay congregants at C3 Denton, then they would be able to provide lay-level counseling services to individuals who had minor counseling needs. This would relieve some of the burden for pastoral counseling from C3 Denton's pastoral staff.

To address this need for training, the researcher developed a six-week class in lay-level pastoral counseling that introduced its participants to a few different counseling elements. It was intentionally designed to aid its participants in developing a basic framework to counsel from. The goal of this class was to prepare its participants to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services. If the majority of the participants in this study felt prepared to provide counseling services after taking this class, then this study will have been considered a success. Initially, the researcher recruited ten individuals to participate in this class. Due to unforeseen circumstances, two of them dropped out, and eight individuals participated in this class. If at least five out of these eight participants felt prepared to provide pastoral counseling services to congregants at C3 Denton after taking this class, then that will make a majority and this action research thesis project will be considered a success.

Analysis of Post-Class Interview Data

After the six-week class concluded, the researcher conducted phone interviews with each of the participants in this study to collect data regarding this class. The interview questions were focused on understanding the experiences that the participants had in this class, specific ways

that they grew in their counseling skills, how this class could be improved if it were taught again in the future, and most importantly, if the participants felt prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to congregants at C3 Denton after completing this course. The last question was the most critical because its answers would determine if this action research thesis project was successful. There were a total of seven questions asked in the post-class interviews. The responses to each of these questions will now be analyzed.

Interview Question 1

The first interview question was “What was your favorite part of the Applying Hope class?”. This question was designed to assist the participants in recapping the class contents and help the researcher understand how the participants experienced the class. The following table contains keywords and phrases from the responses for each participant.

Participant 1	Active listening, mental illness, trauma, suicide
Participant 2	Zoom
Participant 3	Zoom, easy to follow and understand, practical, easy to follow format
Participant 4	Mental illness, trauma, addiction, active listening, compassionate attitudes
Participant 5	Active listening
Participant 6	One-on-one interactions, immediately practicing [counseling skills]
Participant 7	Level of participation, hands-on conversations
Participant 8	Counsel people, different elements that play into counseling

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Active listening	3
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Zoom	2
Mental illness	2
Trauma	2
Breakout room sessions	4

The most mentioned or alluded to element was the breakout room sessions, which occurred at the end of each class for the first five weeks. These breakout room sessions, which were an opportunity for the participants to practice their counseling skills in a one-on-one scenario, were featured in four of the eight responses to this question. The second most mentioned or alluded to element was active listening, which three different participants directly mentioned. Active listening is a strategy for listening in the counseling context. The counselor focuses on hearing out the individual, asking probing questions, engaging with their body language, and summarizing what the client says to ensure understanding. Active listening, and the practice that came from breakout rooms, were the two most mentioned or alluded to elements in the responses to interview question 1.

Interview Question 2

The second interview question was, "What aspect of this class stuck out to you the most?". Like the first question, this question was also designed to assist the participants in recapping the class contents and help the researcher understand how the participants experienced the class. The following table contains keywords and phrases from the responses for each participant.

Participant 1	Open up, share our experiences, relate to real life
Participant 2	Referrals, contingency plans, boundaries

Participant 3	Active listening, active listening applied, mental disorders, trauma, addiction
Participant 4	Active listening, practice on each other
Participant 5	Secular counseling mixed with religious counseling
Participant 6	Active listening, Gospel
Participant 7	Counseling is not always as formal, counseling on a lay level
Participant 8	Getting the chance to apply everything

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Active listening	3
Breakout room sessions	4

Like the first question, the most mentioned or alluded to keywords and phrases were active listening and the breakout room sessions. Because the first two questions were gauging the most memorable aspects of this class, it is apparent that these two elements were consequential for the participants.

Interview Question 3

The third interview question was “Did you have any “Lightbulb” or “Ah-ha!” moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?” This question was designed to help the researcher gauge some of the participants' insights gained during this class and better understand how this class prepared them to do lay counseling. The following table contains keywords and phrases from the responses for each participant.

Participant 1	Trauma, projecting trauma [client to counselor], hurting people hurt people
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Participant 2	Boundaries and referrals, developing support [for the counselor]
Participant 3	Addiction, sin, Romans 7, smoking
Participant 4	Biblical references, trauma, triggers [related to trauma]
Participant 5	No “lightbulb” moments
Participant 6	Mental illnesses, each person’s uniqueness
Participant 7	Active listening [applied to] marriage... friendships... [and] counseling
Participant 8	Trauma, [trauma victims] blaming themselves

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Trauma	3
Biblical references	2

The two most mentioned or alluded to phrases from this interview question were trauma and biblical references for counseling preparation. The trauma portion of this seemed to make a unique impact on participants due to multiple individuals' personal experiences. The researcher began the class by sharing about his childhood trauma related to parental abuse and how it affected him as an adult. This led to other participants sharing about trauma that they had previously experienced, involving sexual abuse, childhood physical abuse, and divorce. Amid multiple participants vulnerably sharing their trauma-related stories, the researcher informed the participants that past trauma leads to difficulty in relationships, which seemed to be an impactful moment for some participants.

Meanwhile, the numerous biblical references cited throughout this class also seemed to be very beneficial. Each class began with a brief discussion of Proverbs 12:18, “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Each class would continue with a biblical grounding for the week’s topic; biblical references were numerous in this class. Participant 3 noted that in the lesson on addiction, a "lightbulb" moment occurred when the researcher analyzed addiction in light of Romans 7:15-25. This helped him understand his previous addictions to tobacco, alcohol, and pornography. The biblical references in this class were a helpful grounding which was informative and helpful for guiding this class.

Interview Question 4

The fourth interview question was, "If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?" This question was designed to help the researcher understand the shortcomings of this class and how it can be refined if taught in the future. The following table contains keywords and phrases from the responses for each participant.

Participant 1	Active listening, scenario-based prompts [related to breakout room sessions]
Participant 2	More input from the students
Participant 3	Active listening, application, intentionality
Participant 4	Worst case scenario, critical thinking, sheet of biblical examples [to reference]
Participant 5	Deeper in the area of trauma
Participant 6	Addiction, porn addiction [more depth in this topic]
Participant 7	Covid-19 [keeping this class online], one class with all guys, one with all girls
Participant 8	Zoom [makes the class more awkward]

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Active listening	2
Zoom	2

Due to this question's nature, there was minimal overlap in the responses between the participants. Two of the individuals mentioned or alluded to the class being improved if it were in-person instead of Zoom. Due to the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and C3 Denton's response to it, it would not have been feasible to do this class in person. If the researcher taught this class after the Covid-19 pandemic ended, it would be taught in-person instead of Zoom.

Two participants brought up the concept of active listening but with a vastly different approach to improvement. Participant 1 wanted more depth in active listening practice by having additional scenario-based breakout room session prompts, encouraging a deeper engagement level from the participants. Participant 3, however, believed that there was too much emphasis on active listening and believed that the class should have a more in-depth focus on creating an intentional plan in counseling. This was the only critique along those lines; no other participants shared it.

Interview Question 5

The fifth interview question was, "What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?" Like the previous question, this question was designed to help the researcher understand how this class could be refined if it were taught in the future. It also gave the researcher an informed understanding of what further resources that the participants should have to continually equip them in lay-level pastoral counseling. The following table contains keywords and phrases from the responses for each participant.

Participant 1	Sexual abuse, trauma
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Participant 2	Mental illness
Participant 3	Practical plan of application
Participant 4	Everything [A general desire to grow in multiple areas of counseling]
Participant 5	Suicide, working with people who are suicidal
Participant 6	Homework, exercises [assigned by the counselor to the client]
Participant 7	Trauma, psychological and spiritual elements of caring [for trauma victims]
Participant 8	Porn, addiction, depression, anger

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Trauma	2
Mental illness	2
Practical plan	2

Like the previous question, there was minimal overlap between the responses of the participants. However, participants mentioned both trauma and mental illness multiple times. Participants also brought up a desire for more practical training multiple times. It makes sense that more than one person brought up trauma and mental illnesses as areas to grow deeper in because these two subjects are incredibly complex with numerous layers which could be analyzed.

The desire for more practical training was discussed broadly by participant 3, but participant 6 made a specific request. His desire was for homework exercises that he could assign to clients, allowing them to practice concepts related to their counseling. Participant 6 noted that

he had received exercises like these in his personal counseling sessions and communicated their usefulness in counseling to the researcher.

Interview Question 6

The sixth interview question was a two-part question. The first part, which required a response of "Yes" or "No," was "Have you been able to discern any personal growth related to your counseling skills?" Participants who answered "Yes" were then asked to "Explain how you discerned that growth," and participants who answered "No" were then asked to "Explain why you did not discern any growth." This question was designed to help the researcher gauge how effective the class was in equipping its participants in lay-level pastoral counseling. All participants answered "Yes" to the first portion of this interview question and reported that this class helped them grow in their counseling skills. The following table contains keywords and phrases from each participant's responses to this question's second portion.

Participant 1	Active listening, gained...essential tools [related to counseling]
Participant 2	Boundaries
Participant 3	Relationships, tools for counseling
Participant 4	Active listening, personal relationships, strategies
Participant 5	Active listening, relationships
Participant 6	Active listening
Participant 7	Tactics that you taught us, friends of mine
Participant 8	Ministering to people, conversations, counseling strategies, speech

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Active listening	5
Counseling strategies	6
Enriched personal relationships	5

The results from this interview question were overwhelmingly positive, with a large level of overlap. Active listening was referenced from five different participants, strategies related to counseling by six, and an enrichment in personal relationships by five. The fact that six individuals brought up their newly developed strategies or "tools" for counseling showed that this class effectively exposed its participants to these lay pastoral counseling strategies, and may have equipped them in those strategies. Active listening, a strategy for counseling taught in this course, was considered an intrinsically helpful element in discernable growth in this area. Enriched personal relationships, meanwhile, was an unintended area of growth that was widely reported. This will be covered later in this chapter.

Interview Question 7

The seventh and final interview question was also a two-part question. The first part, which required a response of "Yes" or "No," was "If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?" Participants who answered "Yes" were then asked, "How would you approach this counseling?" and participants who answered "No" were then asked if there are "any other factors, such as more training, that would help you feel more prepared to do this?" This question would ultimately determine this project's success because it gauged if the participants of this study felt prepared to counsel fellow C3 Denton congregants after going through this course. Each of the participants in this study

answered yes to the first question, so the researcher did not ask the latter question. The following table contains keywords and phrases from each participant's responses to the second portion of this question.

Participant 1	Meet with the person, let them be heard, listening
Participant 2	In-person, listen, help [the client] reflect
Participant 3	Set up a time to meet, active listening, ask questions, try to understand
Participant 4	Informal basis, refer, lay-counseling skills
Participant 5	Informal counseling, available to talk, active listening
Participant 6	Concepts in this class, keep up, once a week, committed to their growth, Gospel
Participant 7	Place to chat, ask questions, level of counseling, refer
Participant 8	Comfortable, time and place to talk, give them space, ask questions, boundaries, once a week or every other week

The following table shows the keywords and phrases mentioned or alluded to by multiple participants and the number of mentions or allusions for each.

Intentional meeting	6
Active listening	4
Ask questions	3
Recurring meeting	2
Informal counseling	2
Provide referrals when necessary	2
Counseling strategies	2

This last question, which gauged the level of preparedness that the participants had in lay-level pastoral counseling, saw great results. The participants' answers were varied and nuanced, and each participant showed an understanding of essential counseling skills. The two leading concepts discussed in this question were setting up an intentional meeting with the individual seeking out counseling and using active listening skills. Setting up a meeting, which six participants discussed, is one of the first steps that should be taken when an individual requests pastoral counseling services. This sets the groundwork for a counseling relationship. Active listening, which was referenced by multiple participants in five out of seven interview questions, is a skill that is essential to counseling.

Themes from Responses to Interview Questions

As the researcher conducted, recorded, and analyzed responses from the post-class Interview Questions, some trends began to emerge from the data in the form of keywords, key phrases, or allusions that appeared throughout the questions and responses. Due to their continual presence in the data, these data trends show six themes that can be profitable to explore in-depth. To better understand the strengths, weaknesses, results, and ways that the researcher can refine this class for future administrations, the following themes from the interview questions' responses will be analyzed: Active listening, trauma, mental illness, addiction, and breakout room sessions.

Active Listening

The one element of this class that participants in the post-class interview questions most consistently referenced was active listening. This specific skill was either directly mentioned or alluded to eighteen times by various participants throughout the interview questions. Seven out

of the eight participants discussed this concept at some point in their interview; many of them brought up active listening multiple times. Only one of the interview questions did not have active listening mentioned or alluded to in any of its responses. Question 5, which asked, "What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?" notably had no mention of active listening. While some of the participants brought up other counseling areas, such as trauma and mental illnesses here, nobody verbalized a desire to learn more about active listening. Instead, it was widely regarded as a valuable skill that the researcher successfully taught in this class.

It is not surprising that active listening was such a consistent response from the participants in the post-class interview. The researcher actively taught this skill in weeks one and two,¹⁴⁰ and in the breakout room sessions for weeks 1-5, it was used as the counseling practice framework. After the first two breakout room sessions, some participants reported feeling relatively uncomfortable practicing active listening because it went against their instincts to give advice and find solutions. As the weeks progressed, the participants tended to note that they were getting accustomed to active listening in the breakout room sessions. Near the end of the class, a few of the participants mentioned that they had successfully used that skill in their personal relationships to great success. This was a valuable element in this class, and in future administrations of this class, active listening will continue to be part of its central framework for counseling.

Trauma

¹⁴⁰ In week one of the class, the focus was on defining what lay-level pastoral counseling is, and active listening was introduced as a tool for counseling. This introduction was built upon in the second week of the class, where the focus was on developing a counseling framework.

During week five of this class, the focus was on trauma and counseling those who had experienced minor forms of trauma. This focus impacted the participants because the subject of trauma was either directly mentioned or alluded to eleven times during the post-class interviews. Notably, trauma was mentioned three times in question 3, "Did you have any "Lightbulb" or "Ah-ha!" moments during the class? If so, could you explain them?". During the week that trauma was discussed, multiple individuals shared their own experiences with trauma. Some of the participants were able to connect their own trauma and patterns of behavior in their personal lives. This led to a breakthrough for some of the participants as the realities of the multi-faceted effect that trauma has on its victims began to set in. The reality that trauma victims tend to project their trauma onto others they are close to seemed impactful. If the researcher extended this class into ten or twelve-weeks in the future, it would be beneficial to have multiple sessions on this subject.

Mental Illness

During week four of this class, the focus was on mental illness and counseling those with common, minor mental illnesses such as minor depression or anxiety. The subject of mental illness was either directly mentioned or alluded to five times during the post-class interviews. It had the most mentions or allusions in question five, "What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?". Two individuals brought up wanting to go deeper with the topic of mental illnesses. During the week that mental illnesses were discussed, one of the participants shared that he has dealt with an extreme bipolar disorder for his entire life, which gives him a special soft spot for others who deal with mental illnesses. This subject did not have as much interest as trauma in the interviews. Still, due to the prevalence of mental illnesses in

America, it would be beneficial to do a deeper dive into mental illnesses related to lay-level pastoral counseling in the future.

Addiction

During week three of this class, the focus was on addiction and counseling those who deal common, minor addictions such as pornography addictions. Like mental illness, the subject of addiction was directly mentioned or alluded to five times in the post-class interviews. Notably, two different individuals mentioned pornography addiction in their interviews; once in question four, "If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?", and once in question five, "What are some areas of counseling you would like to learn more about?". During the week that addiction was discussed, multiple individuals explained that they have dealt with pornography addictions in the past. Pornography addiction is a prevalent addiction in America, and it should be addressed in trainings for pastoral counselors. As participant 6 noted in their post-class interview, more depth on this subject would be warranted in this class's future administrations.

Breakout Room Sessions

The last theme that emerged from the data was the helpfulness of the breakout room sessions and how the researcher could improve them in the future. The breakout room sessions, which occurred near the end of class during weeks 1-5, were a place where the participants were paired up and given the opportunity to practice their counseling skills with each other through role-playing scenarios. During weeks 1 and 2, the participants were given general prompts to go by. For weeks 3 – 5, the participants were given scenario-based prompts related to the specialized issue discussed that week. Overall, these breakout room sessions were a success. These breakout rooms were the place that hands-on learning occurred. The individuals had the

opportunity to practice the counseling skills that had just been discussed moments after learning about them.

The most productive weeks were the weeks when the participants were given scenario-based prompts based on the specialized issue at hand. During these weeks, the researcher generated a hypothetical scenario that related to addiction, mental illness, or trauma, depending on the week, and the participants counseled each other through those hypothetical scenarios. In response to question 4, "If this class were offered in the future, what would you do to improve it?", participant 1 noted that the scenario-based prompts from weeks 3-5 were more effective than the general prompts for weeks 1 and 2. Through tweaking the prompts for the first two weeks to make them scenario-based, the breakout rooms could be improved and made more effective.

Intended results

This thesis project's primary objective was for its participants to feel prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to the congregants at C3 Denton. An analysis of the data shows that this occurred. When the researcher asked each participant, "If you were given the opportunity to provide your counseling services to somebody you know who goes to C3 Denton, on a formal or informal basis, would you feel prepared to provide those services?" all eight of the participants said "Yes" before explaining a detailed, informed plan on how they would approach providing their services. No individuals answered "No" to that questions, so this thesis project clearly achieved its primary objective, yielding this intended result.

Under the umbrella of the primary objective, the participants reported a growth in a few different areas related to counseling preparation. These included participants developing an understanding and application of pastoral counseling strategies, a focus on active listening, and a

general comfort with counseling as a result of the breakout room sessions. During the Applying Hope class, the researcher taught a variety of strategies to aid with counseling. These included concepts such as innate self-actualization, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic response. These concepts were analyzed biblically, theologically, and theoretically, as well as practically applied. While the participants did not directly name these strategies in their post-class interviews, they were referenced generally as counseling strategies that seemed to click with many of the participants. Strategies like these were designed to be informative for the counselor and aid the counselor in understanding how individuals change for the better from both a biblically informed and Client-Centered (Rogerian) perspective.

The counseling strategy that led to popularity among the participants was active listening. Stated or referenced numerous times in the post-class interviews, this specific strategy was presented as a large part of pastoral counseling. It was taught the first two weeks of class, referenced during every week in the class, and practiced in the breakout room sessions for the first five weeks. Focused on ensuring that the client feels heard, active listening was a concept that seemed to revolutionize how some of the participants approached listening, both in counseling scenarios and in general. The researcher focused on active listening so intensely because he intended this skill to be understood and applied by the participants in real-world counseling situations. In a sense, active listening was an essential element of preparedness for lay-level pastoral counseling in this context. Multiple participants referenced and discussed active listening throughout their post-class interviews, with most of these references relating to its application. For this reason, many of the participants gaining a practical understanding of active listening as it relates to counseling is a result of this thesis project that the researcher intended to see.

Many of the participants also reported a general comfort with counseling. This came in part from the practice in the breakout room sessions. Near the end of the first five class sessions, the researcher paired up each participant and had them practice counseling each other in Zoom breakout rooms using a pre-determined prompt. This allowed the participants to practice the concepts that had just been discussed and practice their counseling skills in a safe environment. This helped many of the participants feel more confident in their ability to counsel others using the strategies they learned in this class. The comfort in counseling that was developed through the breakout room sessions was another result that the researcher intended.

The reports of participants feeling acquainted with general counseling strategies, especially active listening, and being comfortable with counseling due to the breakout room sessions were intended results that tie into the primary objective of this class – preparing the participants to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services. Through the intentional format of this class, numerous variables worked together to bring about this intended result. All of the participants reported an adequate level of preparation to provide their services to the congregants of C3 Denton.

Unintended results

While this study succeeded in its intended result of preparing its participants to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services, it also had two additional positive results that were unintended. In the post-class interviews, multiple individuals reported an enrichment in their personal relationships as a result of their new-found active listening skills, as well as a deeper understanding of trauma or addiction that they had personally experienced before taking this class.

In the second part of the sixth interview question, the participants were asked to explain how they discerned growth in their counseling skills. While there were a variety of answers given, five of the participants noted an enrichment in their personal relationships as evidence of growth in their counseling skills. Through using active listening in the context of friendships, casual relationships, and even romantic relationships, those who used this skill in contexts outside of counseling noted improvement in those relationships. One participant also noted a desire to use this skill in the context of his personal relationships because he recognized it as a valuable skill for enriching them.

Meanwhile, in response to the third question, which asked if any "Lightbulb" moments occurred during the class, four individuals noted a deeper understanding of their previously experienced personal traumas or addictions. These personal connections occurred in the context of class conversations, and were extraordinary to witness. One individual, who was previously addicted to cigarettes, noted that the biblical metaphor for addiction in Romans 7 helped him to understand why he struggled so profoundly with addiction in his past. This realization was a turning point for him. During the session on addiction, this participant explained the connection between Romans 7 and his previous addictions and how he now had a framework for understanding his past self. Meanwhile, another individual, who had experienced repeated sexual abuse in her adolescence, noted that the connection between previous trauma and unrelated situations leading to flashbacks of her trauma was extremely beneficial. During the session on trauma, a similar connection was made by her, and she shared how helpful the session was for understanding her own physiological and psychological response to her trauma. Two others reported similar experiences in question 3, and those two individuals made similar connections to their previously experienced trauma during that class time.

While enrichment of personal relationships, and a deeper connection with previously experienced trauma and addictions were not anticipated results of this class, they had positive effects on the participants. In that sense, the class had the unintended effect of bringing personal enrichment to the personal lives of the majority of the participants. While this is not directly related to the skills required to provide adequate lay-level pastoral counseling services, this reported personal enrichment seemed to aid the participants in their personal growth, which would theoretically deepen their ability to provide counseling to those who have experienced similar issues.

Success Statement

At this point, the researcher must determine the success of this thesis project. This project sought to address the problem that many congregants at C3 Denton would be willing to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services but did not understand how to provide them due to a lack of adequate preparation. To address this problem, this project's purpose was to provide basic training for the congregants of C3 Denton in how to provide lay-level pastoral counseling to fellow Christians. Chapter 1 of this thesis concluded with the following statement: "This thesis project will be considered a success if the majority of the participants who took and completed the Applying Hope class feel prepared to provide lay level pastoral counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton that are experiencing minor issues." Out of the eight participants who took and completed this class, if at least five reported feeling prepared to provide those services, then this project will be considered a success.

Not only did this thesis project meet this benchmark, it exceeded it. All eight participants who took and completed the Applying Hope class reported feeling prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton that are experiencing

minor issues. The data shows a 100% success rate. While there are some considerations for improving this class that will be explored in the next chapter, this project's success is undeniable. Because 100% of the participants in this thesis project reported feeling prepared to provide lay-level counseling services to other individuals who attend C3 Denton that are experiencing minor issues, this Doctorate of Ministry action research thesis project was a success.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Throughout this Doctorate of Ministry action research thesis project, the researcher articulated a localized problem related to pastoral counseling at C3 Denton, proposed a potential solution to this problem, developed and implemented an intervention design, and analyzed the data collected to determine that this solution was successful.

Concluding Analysis

Thesis Project Recap

There is a growing need for pastoral counseling within the modern church, and often this need is not adequately met by pastoral staff due to other ministry concerns. C3 Denton, like countless other churches, was faced with this dilemma; the need for pastoral counseling is very strong at this church. Meanwhile, several individuals attended this church that would provide pastoral counseling services on the lay-level but were unable to due to a lack of preparation. Through rigorous research and planning, the researcher recruited ten individuals at C3 Denton to take Applying Hope, a six-week class on lay-level pastoral counseling designed to prepare its participants to provide those needed services at C3 Denton. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this class was offered over Zoom, which is a videoconferencing platform. While two out of these ten individuals did not complete this class due to unforeseen circumstances, eight of them did complete the class. In post-class interviews, all eight of these participants noted that they felt prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services to their fellow congregants at C3 Denton. Through an analysis of this data, the researcher determined that this study succeeded in

its goal and that this class successfully prepared its participants to counsel pastorally on the lay-level.

This class was rooted in a synthesis of biblical and theoretical concepts, with an influence from Rogerian Theory. Proverbs 12:18, "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing," was presented as the biblical ideal for counseling and reviewed during each class. There were a variety of topics were explored each week, including how to develop a framework for counseling, and the difficult subjects of addiction, mental illness, and trauma as they relate to lay-level pastoral counseling. The first five weeks of the class concluded with a thirty-minute breakout room session, where the participants practiced counseling each other through hypothetical scenarios. The final week did not have a breakout room session.

After the class concluded, the researcher conducted post-class interviews over the phone with each participant who completed the class. The interviews, which were designed to help the researcher understand how the participants experienced the class, how the class could be improved, and if the class left the participants feeling prepared to begin counseling on the lay-level, gave the researcher valuable data. The most mentioned or alluded to concept in these post-class interviews was active listening, which was the researcher's practical framework to help the participants understand how to counsel from a client-centered perspective. Through developing active listening skills in this class, many of the participants noted that it had a positive effect not only on their ability to counsel others but also in the context of personal relationships. As mentioned before, every participant felt prepared to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services in the post-class interviews, which made this study a success.

Literature Review Revisited

In this project's literature review in chapter 2, the researcher noted that there is a "necessity of training lay church members to provide pastoral counseling services." According to Garzon, this is because many Americans attend church regularly that would benefit from counseling but are unable to receive those services due to the financial burden of professional counseling and the inability of their pastor to provide those services due to the many demands of pastoral ministry.¹⁴¹ Because professional counseling is often unattainable, as well as pastoral counseling from clergy, lay counselors are a strong option for meeting that need for counseling. However, any counselor – lay or otherwise, needs some level of training. According to Floyd, training can help pastoral counselors avoid doing unnecessary harm to their clients.¹⁴² An adequate training level is necessary for counselors, especially for those who practice on the lay level.

With this in mind, the researcher connected the larger need for pastoral counseling services to the localized context of C3 Denton. To meet the need for pastoral counseling in this church, the researcher sought to recruit several individuals from the laity to provide those services. To ensure that this counseling is practiced appropriately, the researcher provided a six-week basic training for the participants of the study. There are now eight individuals who regularly attend C3 Denton that have received training in pastoral counseling and feel prepared to provide pastoral counseling services on the lay-level. If they begin to actively counsel individuals at C3 Denton, whether on a formal or informal basis, then they will effectively assist

¹⁴¹ Fernando Garzon et al., "Lay Christian Counseling and Client Expectations for Integration in Therapy," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28, no. 2 (2009), 113.

¹⁴² Scott Floyd, *Crisis Counseling: a Guide for Pastors and Professionals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 18.

the pastoral staff of C3 Denton by helping to meet the need for pastoral counseling in their church.

Beginning of a Lay Counseling Team

At this point, it is essential to note that this project's success does not reflect the amount of lay pastoral counseling that has been done thus far by its participants. This project provided the groundwork for a lay counseling team at C3 Denton. However, laying the groundwork is where this project ends. The researcher has located eight individuals at C3 Denton who desire to provide counseling services and provided them a basic training which has helped them feel prepared to counsel on the lay level. While this has been a monumental task, it has only served as a starting point.

Now that eight individuals are prepared to counsel, the next step is for the researcher to find creative ways to continually mentor and encourage them to feel enabled to put their pastoral counseling skills to use. If the researcher takes no further steps in this regard, then the skills gained by the participants in this study may not be put to use, and the need for pastoral counseling services at C3 Denton may continue to be largely unmet. While some of the participants in this study may find themselves counseling others on a formal or informal basis, continued development of the lay counseling team would keep the concept of counseling before the participants of this study and pave the way for more like-minded congregants to join their ranks. One of the ways that the researcher immediately aided the participants of this study is by emailing them a list of community referral resources.¹⁴³

Proposed five-year plan

¹⁴³ See Appendix A

The data has shown that this thesis project was successful in its goal of preparing a group of individuals to provide lay-level pastoral counseling services. This success has served as a foundation for a successful lay counseling team at C3 Denton. However, if nothing is built upon this foundation, then the labor put into this project will have minimal meaningful results. To take the foundation that was laid in this project and turn it into a thriving lay counseling ministry that serves the congregants of C3 Denton and benefits the greater community, an intentional plan of action has been developed. To ensure the longevity of this ministry, this plan of action extends over the next five years.

The first step in this plan of action is to create and recruit members for a lay counseling team. To do this, the researcher will reach out to each of the participants of this study and ask them to consider joining said team. While it may seem evident that the participants would be part of a counseling team, this study did not assess if its participants would join a counseling team; it only assessed if they felt prepared to counsel pastorally on the lay level. Any inclusion into a counseling team would require their consent. The requirement for joining this team would be a desire to provide counseling services and have completed the Applying Hope class for counseling preparation.

Once the team has been formed, the researcher will discuss with each individual to determine who they are currently counseling, how they are counseling them, their capacity for more clients, as well as their counseling method. To ensure administrative excellence, the researcher will create a Google spreadsheet that is accessible to all members of the team, noting who each individual is counseling, pertinent notes regarding their clients which other team members may benefit from (i.e., suicidal ideations), and the number of additional clients that

each team member feels able to handle. This number would be added together to determine the total number of clients that the lay counseling team is able to take on.

The next step would be to get the word out to the congregants of C3 Denton that there is a lay counseling team accepting clients. This could occur through a few different mediums: Sunday morning announcements, parish (small group) announcements, and church-wide emails. To avoid an immediate overload of counseling requests, announcements will start in parishes. To do this, each parish leader would be informed by the researcher that this team is available and announce to their parish that anybody who would benefit from this team's service can reach out to the researcher, Ryan Ladner, who is the administrator of this team. The parish leaders would be asked to give his contact information to those who showed interest. After parish announcements have been made, and if there is ample room for more clients, then an announcement may be made on a Sunday morning and sent in the weekly church-wide email. Ideally, this recruitment phase will take place over the course of a month.

Once the counseling team has the desired number of clients, recruiting for this service will temporarily halt, and the focus will shift to ensuring that the counseling is done excellently. Through in-person conversations, text messages, and phone calls, the researcher will check in with each individual on the team regarding their counseling experiences as needed (at the discretion of the researcher) or at least once a month, and ensure that they feel supported in their counseling endeavors. He will also make himself available to discuss their counseling whenever they have something that they need to talk through. To ensure a sense of community among the team members, a GroupMe group messaging thread will be in use so that each team member can share thoughts with each other as they desire.

The key to this phase will be quality of counseling over quantity of counseling. The ideal will be for each client to receive about six months of consistent counseling from the team, with the option for more counseling if necessary. If each team member counsels their clients with excellence for at least six months, then this phase will be considered a success. From there, the recruitment phase for clients will restart, and this six-month phase will happen a second time with a new set of clients before the next phase of this plan begins.

After approximately one year of successful lay counseling from this team, the Applying Hope class will be taught a second time and used to recruit a new group of lay-level pastoral counselors for the lay counseling team. At the end of the year, the current team will be given two options: Take a break from the team (one year of service warrants the opportunity to step back), or continue with the team. Those who continue with the team will be encouraged to retake Applying Hope, but not required. The team members who do decide to continue and take the class the second time will be given the opportunity to have their input in the implementation of the class, including the potential to teach individual segments of it. This will serve a variety of purposes, including allowing the seasoned team members to provide leadership to this ministry, bring a variety of voices to the table during the second round of classes, and allow them to strengthen their own skills in counseling through teaching.

For the second administration of Applying Hope, a recruitment phase will occur through a series of Sunday morning announcements, church-wide emails, and general word-of-mouth recruiting, similar to the recruiting phase for the first administration. If the Covid-19 pandemic has subsided and it becomes appropriate, this class will either be taught for six weeks on Sunday mornings during the church's equipping hour (9:00 AM) or on Wednesday evenings during the church's open Bible study hour (7:00 PM). The requirements for this class will be the same as it

was for the first administration of this class, except that those who have received some level of training in pastoral counseling in the past will be allowed to participate. Improvements to this class based on participant feedback will be implemented. These improvements will be discussed in-depth in the next section.

After the class has been taught a second time, the first year's process will be repeated. The researcher and team administrator will recruit those who took the class and are willing to join the counseling team, administrate the client recruiting process, provide support and mentorship to the team members, and generally assure that the counseling occurs with excellence. However, if any team members from the first year show a desire to lead the newer members of the team, they will be given creative opportunities to serve according to their skillset.

Ideally, this process would continually repeat itself for a total of five years, and if successful, would result in a robust lay counseling ministry at C3 Denton. Part of this process would involve intentional leadership development. If the need arises for further support groups for those who have experienced unique difficulties such as trauma or addiction, and there is adequate leadership from within the lay counseling team to support these groups, they may also be implemented. After five years, if a robust lay counseling ministry has been established with a group of leaders serving according to their skillset (instead of just the researcher providing leadership), then the future of the lay counseling ministry would be determined in a round-table format by multiple voices.

Improvements for Future Administrations

Part of the proposed five-year plan for C3 Denton's potential lay counseling team is the Applying Hope class's yearly administration. This would open the doors for more individuals to

join the lay counseling team and give current team members the opportunity to grow in leadership by teaching portions of this class. Based on the post-class interviews and collaborating with experts, the following improvements to this class are likely to be made: Extending the class to ten weeks to allow a deeper dive into the subjects; if possible, having the class occur in-person instead of over Zoom, and connecting the participants with beneficial literature relevant to pastoral counseling.

One of the common items of feedback regarding potential improvement was the desire of many to go into more depth in certain areas. These areas included the subject of pornography addiction, trauma, and worst-case scenarios. While these subjects were covered during the class sessions, their attention was brief due to a short amount of time. This is unfortunate due to the importance of these subjects. While the brief, six-week format of this class served as a strength, it was also a weakness because important subjects did not get as much attention as they should have received. With that in mind, future administrations of this class will be extended from six weeks to ten weeks, with four additional weeks available to go further in-depth on these essential topics.

The topics that will be explored during those weeks will be decided through consultation with potential leadership and an analysis of the data from this project. Based on the data from this project and the perceived needs at C3 Denton, at least one of these weeks should be focused on the concept of pornography addiction as it relates to counseling, and another week should be focused on going further in exploring the concept of trauma. The subject of the other two additional weeks would be determined closer to the next administration.

Another area that this class can hopefully be improved in is its medium for delivery, which was online due to a pandemic affecting Denton County. This pandemic was caused by

Covid-19, which is a zoonotic virus originating in China, according to the World Health Organization.¹⁴⁴ First observed in China at the end of 2019 as “a cluster of pneumonia cases” that worsened in January of 2020, this newly identified disease was from a “novel coronavirus,” which began to spread rapidly around China, Southeast Asia, and the world.¹⁴⁵ This highly contagious virus led to an unprecedented strain on hospital systems, and numerous deaths. In response to this outbreak, a global pandemic was declared on March 11th, 2020. In response to the declaration of a global pandemic, society came to a halt as schools, businesses, and churches paused in-person activity for the sake of slowing the spread of this virus. This included C3 Denton. C3 Denton temporarily transitioned all activities to an online format when the pandemic was declared, and has since re-established Sunday morning services to an in-person format with livestreaming capacities.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, rapidly increasing cases in Denton County, and strain on local hospitals from Covid-19 patients, C3 Denton has opted to restructure as many in-person activities possible to make them compatible with Zoom. While the Sunday morning service and pre-service Bible studies are currently in-person (with masking and social distancing required), every other event takes place over Zoom. All church-wide member meetings, parish gatherings, and weekly Bible studies occur over Zoom. This is to mitigate the chance of exposure to Covid-19 at C3 Denton.

The unfortunate fact is that events like these are not as natural over Zoom as in-person, and Applying Hope is no exception. If possible, future administrations of this class will be

¹⁴⁴ World Health Organization. “Archived: Who Timeline - Covid-19.” Accessed February 23, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

conducted in-person at C3 Denton's physical church building instead of through Zoom. This would allow for more freedom with in-class conversations; the breakout room sessions would allow the participants to practice their body language in counseling intentionally; organic conversations before and after the class would be possible, allowing for a greater sense of comradery among the participants. While Zoom has been a helpful tool for C3 Denton during the Covid-19 pandemic, this counseling class will benefit significantly when Zoom is no longer required.

Applying Hope's ability to occur in-person over Zoom will depend upon the current infection rates in Denton county and strain on the hospitals at the time of its administration. Recently, multiple vaccines for Covid-19 were approved for use by the general public and made available to qualifying residents based on its supply. The congregants and leadership of C3 Denton, along with a multitude of people across the planet, are hoping and praying that the end to this pandemic and that life will return to normal soon. If a sense of normalcy is returned to Denton County before the next administration of Applying Hope, then it will be offered in an in-person format. However, if county health officials recommend that C3 Denton continue to offer classes like these over Zoom instead of in-person, then it will continue to be offered through the Zoom videoconferencing platform. While the medium of this class will be determined by factors out of the hands of the researcher, the length and depth of this class will be altered for the sake of bettering this class.

This class can also be improved through connecting its participants with helpful literature related to pastoral counseling. There is a plethora of literature on pastoral counseling, which would be of benefit to those who take this class. To connect participants to solid literature in this field, the researcher will provide the participants with a list of recommended readings and

resources.¹⁴⁶ This will allow the participants the opportunity to independently peruse and draw wisdom from a variety of helpful outside sources.

Possible Use in Outside Churches

Beyond use at C3 Denton, this course and corresponding materials that are to-be developed may have the ability to be applied in other churches to assist them in developing and maintaining lay counseling teams. The localized problem that this thesis project sought to address is applicable to other congregations and may be a viable solution to solve this problem in some congregations as well. There is a growing need for pastoral counseling in the modern church that is not always adequately met by the clergy. However, like at C3 Denton, there may be numerous individuals within a given congregation that would be able to provide those services on a lay level if they had proper training. If the current plan for establishing a lay counseling team succeeds and proves beneficial for C3 Denton, then the contents of the class and strategies associated with developing a lay counseling team could be codified and made available to other churches as a helpful resource.

As it stands, the researcher's focus is on implementing a five-year plan to ensure that a lay counseling team at C3 Denton is established and ran excellently. This plan, which involves continual recruitment of new counseling clients, support for the counseling team, and recruiting new counselors through annual administrations of a refined version of Applying Hope, has a design that, if successful, is replicable in other church contexts. If this endeavor has been successful over two or three years, the researcher may create a resource that makes the previously described elements available to churches that also desire to create a thriving lay counseling ministry.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix B

This resource would contain a few different elements: Recruitment strategies for the Applying Hope class, Power-Point presentations and/or pre-recorded lectures designed to guide the Applying Hope class, strategies for transitioning the class participants into a functioning counseling team, blank documents for administrating the counseling team, and further resources for continual growth in the realm of lay-level pastoral counseling. This would be best suited as an electronic resource, though it would be possible to have some elements made available in print. To ensure that its implementation in other churches is successful, the researcher would begin slowly by making it available to a handful of interested churches and providing support as needed. In the process, the researcher would gather feedback from the churches using this as a resource to improve and refine its approach before making it broadly available as a published resource.

Theological Foundations revisited

The issue that this thesis project sought to address, as well as the proposed five-year plan for developing a lay counseling team at C3 Denton, is a practical outworking of a theological truth. There are numerous Christians today who have internal, psychological, and emotional wounding, which have a variety of causes. God's plan is for them to receive eternal healing of those internal wounds, and in God's goodness, He also provides the outlet for those wounds to be partially healed today through the ministry of pastoral counselors.

One of the realities of life in a broken world is that people experience pain, both physically and emotionally. On the emotional level, pain can hide underneath the surface and fester for extended lengths of time. Pain like this can have a variety of causes – including sexual abuse, physical abuse, trauma, addiction, relational conflict, and many others. Unfortunately, becoming a Christian does not immediately solve the issue of emotional pain. For this reason,

Tan and Scalise explain that churches are “full of hurting people who are struggling”.¹⁴⁷

Churches, which are the front line for the ministry of the Gospel, are filled with struggling people who have emotional pain.

While the emotional struggles of countless Christians are evident, the love that God has for emotionally wounded believers is also evident. Psalm 34:18 says that “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” Believers who have a broken heart due to emotional pain and wounding have a nearness to the Lord that is special. As Longman explains, God gives unique help to Christians who are internally wounded, both psychologically and emotionally.¹⁴⁸ The hurting people who fill churches may not realize it, but God is much closer to them than they may realize.

This extraordinary nearness has benefits. Namely, eternal healing of the soul. This is best exemplified in Revelation 21:4, which explains that God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes [believers], and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” When Christ returns and establishes His eternal kingdom, all of the sorrow that every emotionally wounded believer has will be ended, and there will be perfect, uncorrupted healing. As Weinrich, et al. point out, this will be the end of suffering for all of the saints.¹⁴⁹ God's extraordinary and special nearness to the brokenhearted believers who are struggling will culminate in an eternal healing of every emotional wound that plagues them.

¹⁴⁷ Siang-Yang Tan and Eric T. Scalise, *Lay Counseling: Equipping Christians for a Helping Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 12.

¹⁴⁸ Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic/ InterVarsity Press, 2014), 170.

¹⁴⁹ William C. Weinrich et al., *Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

In the shadow of this eternal hope, the opportunity for partial healing is made available through the ministry of pastoral counselors. In the Christian context, pastoral counselors are individuals who embody the words of Proverbs 12:18: “the tongue of the wise brings healing.” They are individuals who have minds that have been shaped by wisdom, and their speech can enable those who are wounded to find a sense of healing. While pastoral counselors may not be able to catalyze perfect healing, they do have the ability to help those who are hurting to experience a portion of their eternal healing.

While pastoral counseling is typically done by either pastors (clergy), or professional pastoral counselors, there are practical and theological reasons for training the laity to provide those services. On the practical level, pastoral counseling services are not always available to those who need them. This is due to the many requirements and commitments that the ministry places on the clergy and many individuals' inability to afford professional pastoral counseling. Having a group of lay members trained to provide these services on a volunteer basis makes pastoral counseling services accessible to those congregants who would not otherwise receive them.

On the theological level, pastoral counseling is a ministry of the church, and because of this, there is a biblical warrant for the church's leadership to equip the laity so that they can walk in that ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 explains that the purpose of church leaders, "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers," is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." While there are reasons for some pastoral counseling cases to be handled by the clergy, members of the laity should be empowered to provide pastoral counseling services. This is because pastoral counseling is a legitimate, necessary work of ministry that builds up the body of Christ. Through allowing the laity to be

equipped to practice pastoral counseling, they are given the opportunity to be part of God's plan for soul healing.

The need for training lay congregants to provide pastoral counseling services is a strong need with deep theological roots. Lay-level pastoral counselors have the opportunity to build up the body of Christ by doing a specific ministry work that enables brokenhearted Christians to experience healing for their emotional wounds. This is a vital ministry of the church that is often overlooked by the clergy and at times inaccessible to those who need it. Nevertheless, it is absolutely vital. This is because pastoral counseling is a mechanism that God uses to provide a picture of eternal healing that He will provide to all His people struggling with brokenheartedness.

Summation

This Doctorate of Ministry action research thesis project sought to prepare a group of lay congregants at C3 Denton to provide pastoral counseling services to individuals at C3 Denton who have a need for those services. It accomplished this task over the course of ten weeks. The first two weeks involved a recruiting phase, the next six weeks involved the researcher teaching those participants basic pastoral counseling skills through the Applying Hope class, and the last two weeks involved the researcher conducting phone interviews to determine if the participants of this study felt adequately prepared to provide pastoral counseling services on the lay-level to fellow congregants. 100% of the participants reported feeling prepared for this task, making this thesis project a success.

This thesis project, though successful, was only the beginning. Now that a group of lay-counselors has been equipped, the researcher will now focus on establishing a lay counseling

team, implementing a five-year plan for developing this team, and if appropriate, codifying this class and plan into a resource for other churches to develop their own lay counseling team.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 3, 2020

Ryan Ladner
Ron Hughes

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-407 Applying Hope, Six-Week Course in Pastoral Counseling

Dear Ryan Ladner and Ron Hughes,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

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

APPENDIX B

Community Referral Resources

Participants in this project were provided with the following resources for community referrals:

For food assistance, Freedom Food Pantry. Run by the Denton Freedom House, this pantry provides groceries for anybody who comes, no questions asked. Open Monday - Friday, 1 - 4 PM, the Freedom Food Pantry only requires registration to receive food. For more information, please visit <https://dentonfreedomhouse.org/our-heart/organization/> or call 940-808-1016.

For financial assistance, InterFaith Ministries of Denton. Partnering with the United Way, InterFaith Ministries gives short-term financial aid for individuals and families in crisis. They also seek to empower those they serve to be self-sufficient. For more information, please visit <http://www.ifmdenton.org/> or call 940-565-5479.

For healthcare and counseling assistance, First Refuge Ministries. Providing a variety of services for low income individuals and families, First Refuge has a medical clinic available to those who qualify, as well as counseling services. Requesting only a \$10 donation per visit, First Refuge's medical clinic makes needed medical care available to those who otherwise could not afford it. For more information, please visit <https://firstrefugeministries.org/medical-clinic> or call 940-484-4384.

For substance abuse (drug addiction), Denton Freedom House. This ministry provides free in-house drug rehabilitation from a biblical foundation. With an initial intensive program that lasts six months, the Denton Freedom House provides its graduates with an additional transitional program where its residents reside on campus, attend rehabilitation related classes and support groups, while simultaneously working and beginning their transition into society as a productive citizen. For more information, please go to <https://dentonfreedomhouse.org/> or call 940-565-5990.

For mental health concerns, including suicide evaluations, University Behavioral Health (UBH). Providing a variety of mental health-related services to Denton, UBH treats psychiatric conditions for adults and adolescents. Available 24/7 for individuals in crisis, UBH works together with the individual and family to ensure the best care possible. For more information, please visit <https://ubhdenton.com/> or call 940-320-8100.

For domestic abuse, Denton County Friends of the Family. Specializing in domestic abuse, Friends of the Family provides numerous resources for victims. From its emergency shelter for woman (and children) in active abuse situations, to individual and

(when appropriate) marriage counseling, Denton County Friends of the Family is an advocate for woman who are being abused by their husbands/partners. For more information, please visit <https://www.dcfof.org/> or call 940-382-7273. Pregnancy

For pregnancy concerns, Loreto House. Bringing services such as free pregnancy tests and free parenting classes, Loreto House is a place of support for Denton woman who are pregnant/new parents. For more information, please visit <https://loretohouse.org/services> or call

APPENDIX C

Recommended Readings and Resources

- Benner, D. G. *Strategic pastoral counseling: a short-term structured model*. Baker Academic, 2004.
- Clinton, T. & Hawkins, R. *The popular encyclopedia of Christian counseling: An indispensable tool for helping people with their problems*. Harvest House, 2011.
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- Pierre, J., & Reju, D. *The pastor and counseling: the basics of shepherding members in need*. Crossway, 2015.
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- Thomas, G. *Every body matters: Strengthening your body to strengthen your soul*. Zondervan, 2011.
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- Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2002.
- Wright, H. Norman. *The Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling: What to Do and Say When It Matters Most!* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2014.

(This list of recommended readings and resources will be expanded as the researcher finds helpful additions.)