**CHRISTIANS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUS CONTACT WITH GOD AND**

**SPIRITUAL AWAKENING WITHIN TWELVE STEP PROGRAMS**

by

John D. Goddard

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2023

**CHRISTIANS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUS CONTACT WITH GOD AND**

**SPIRITUAL AWAKENING WITHIN TWELVE STEP PROGRAMS**

By John D. Goddard

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

Approved by:

Mollie Boyd, Ed.D, Committee Chair

Derek Parker, PhD, Committee Member

## Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Christians with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening as a result of prayer and meditation within the context of steps 11 and 12 of the Twelve Step Programs (TSPs) and Christian Twelve Step Programs (CTSPs). The theories guiding this study were existential, transpersonal, and biblical Christianity. Existential theory emphasizes the value of understanding the subjective meaning of phenomena and transpersonal theory bridges psychological and spiritual practices thus allowing this study to derive psychologically meaningful data from descriptions of spiritual experiences and practices (prayer and meditation). A convenience sample of participants was recruited from various Twelve Step organizations and interviewed with respect to their experiences with step 11 prayers and meditation as well as spiritual awakening.

*Keywords*: conscious contact with God, meditation, prayer, spiritual awakening Twelve Step Programs, Christian Twelve Step Programs

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

**List of Abbreviations**

Twelve Step Program (TSP)

Christian Twelve Step Program (CTSP)

Spiritual-But-Not-Religious (SBNR)

Conscious Contact with God (CCWG)

Spontaneous Spiritual Awakening (SSA)

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Overview

Integrating spirituality with recovery from substance use and other addictive disorders is a key component of Twelve Step Programs (TSPs) and Christian Twelve Step Programs (CTSPs). The original TSP was Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), founded in 1935 as an effective process to help the founders refrain from alcohol use (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). The spiritual aspects of the steps begin with the belief in a higher power in step two (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). CTSPs are Christian variations, which recognize the higher power as Jesus Christ/the God of the Bible (Life Recovery, n.d.). The phenomena of interest in this study was the conscious contact with God (CCWG) as experienced through prayer and meditation and spiritual awakening; these aspects represent the basis of steps 11 and 12 of TSPs and CTSPs respectively (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). This chapter presents the research problem and grounds it within a firm historical, social, and theoretical background to establish the bases and rationale for the proposed study. The motivations, assumptions, and operational definitions of the phenomena under investigation are presented as to contextualize the problem and purpose, which guide the work. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature in terms of understanding Christians' experiences with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening within the context of steps 11 and 12 of the TSPs and CTSPs and how it might relate to their recovery experiences.

## Background

Recovering from substance use and other addictive disorders has long been a challenging ordeal for its sufferers. It remains an evolving, complex, and intractable concern for those desiring to help both in treatment and support environments. This study was oriented to

participants in the supportive group milieu of TSPs, which surround addiction recovery treatment, although the Twelve Steps themselves have also been incorporated by treatment professionals working with this population (Sundin & Lilja, 2014). TSPs provide spiritual approach to addiction recovery, which presents problems related to the heterogeneity of spiritual belief and practice. Christians for example, might have unique religious and spiritual understandings and expressions that conflict with those expressed when working within TSPs. CCWG and its overlap with the storied history of TSPs were examined in terms of social and theoretical implications and in relation to their impact on TSP participants, researchers, clinicians, and others involved in the enormously consequential work of addiction recovery.

**Historical**

Human beings have long sought conscious contact with the supernatural as is seen in the shamanism of early people followed by the later emergence of monotheistic beliefs perhaps as early as the hunter-gatherer period (Peoples et al., 2016). This move marks a shift from merely supernatural spiritual inclinations to those directed towards the divine, such as leanings embodied in the Christian religion. Both the spiritual non-religious and Judeo-Christian historical accounts provide important foundational context given the juxtaposition of these two categorizations represented in TSPs and CTSPS respectively. This section covers historical elements of CCWG as represented in the spiritual non-religious and Judeo-Christian perspectives, drawing on scholarly literature as well as biblical explication.

*History of Spiritual Non-Religious CCWG*

Although CCWG term could not be easily located in the literature, relevant material to its study was found in works examining spirtualty and religiosity.  The history of a 'spiritual not-religious' category has been relatively brief owing in large part to the longstanding presence of

formally organized religions, which have predominated the spiritual landscape for centuries (Dossett & Metcalf-White, 2020). Further complicating the study of this category was the instability in the ways through which terms like spirituality, religion, and non-religion were defined in the literature (Dossett & Metcalf-White, 2020). Despite the widespread use of the term spirituality, particularly as an alternative to religion in the literature, Ammerman (2013) argued that the limitations of this either/or binary did little to advance understanding of the complexities of spirituality. Reasonably, spirituality is not a uniform set of teachings or practice, but rather a way of describing one's own approach to matters such as belief in deity. Ammerman's (2013) work found a myriad of definitional understandings of spirituality among participants whether or not they were religiously affiliated. The majority of participants' responses did not reflect a necessary tension between the spiritual and religious, but rather a desire to disassociate with certain forms of religiosity, even among those who were tied to traditional religious communities. This realization led Ammerman to conclude that the term 'spiritual but not religious' might more likely be a newer form of cultural rhetoric rather than representing a new or distinct form of religiosity (Ammerman, 2013).

Indeed, an emphatic distinction between the formalities of outward expressions of religiosity was raised in Christianity in the teachings of Jesus Christ Himself in Matt 5:20-44 (English Standard Version) where He speaks to the insufficiency of external behavioral compliance and the need for an internal change of heart. Ammerman (2013) found that this notion was reflected in Protestant participants, reported to have discussed their opposition to religiosity due to having others in mind who they believed were merely religious and wished to be differentiated from them. This experienced seems to have been derived from teachings such as in Matt 5:20 that opposed the Pharisees as a group for their religiosity, which failed to

properly apprehend the spiritual truths being clarified in the work, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Within the array of experiences of spirituality expressed in religiously identified and non-religiously identified people were a number of different ways of conceptualizing and expressing CCWG. Historically, mystical experiences have been practiced in all religions, though were not limited to the practice of religion (Jones & Gellham, 2022). The nature of mystic experiences varies widely but could perhaps most basically be described as a relationship with consciousness (Keickhefer, 2004). Taylor (2016) referred to these experiences occurring outside religious traditions as extratraditional, noting the similarities in spiritual experiences between and among those within and outside traditional spiritual and religious communities.

### *Judeo-Christian History of CCWG*

CCWG is represented throughout the historical biblical narrative as the unfolding story of human relationship with God as unfolded from creation through the reconciliation of man to God in the New Testament. The contour of the biblical story moves from close contact between humans and God in the creation narrative to a disobedience-driven separation through a period of selective contact from God with particular individuals and culminating in a restoration of intimacy through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:13, 16; 2 Cor 5:18-19, Rom 5:11; Heb 2:17). It further follows the subsequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit described on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Dein (2010) addressed more modern attempts to understand Judeo-Christian religious experiences, particularly with respect to the work of William James. Considerably, Dein (2010) discussed one aspect of this work, including conversion experiences as well as reports of direct experiential encounters of participants with their Savior. This sort of direct contact between God and mankind is presented extensively in the Bible and could be

organized thematically as the pre-fall intimacy by design, separation, and reconciliation.

**Intimacy by Design.** The biblical record clearly depicts humanity's original Edenic state as one in which humans heard directly from God (Gen1:28),  as illustrated by Adam's direct communication with God, who spoke to him when giving him dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). This aspect further aligns with the single condition for man in the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:15-17). The person-God connection was impaired after the mankind's disobedience-driven fall resulting in their hiding themselves from God (Gen 3:8) and subsequent removal from the garden entirely (Gen 3:23). This early state of mankind illustrates the giving nature of God who provides for the nourishment of man (Gen 1:29) as well as his companionship (Gen 2:18). The personal relationship between human beings and God established here was referred to by Dein (2010) as personal religion and was notably the focus of William James' work as opposed to institutional religion. The biblical narrative oscillates between the personal and institutional alignment in its insistence on personal relationship with and accountability to God while also establishing community and accountability to others therein.

**Separation.** The expulsion of man from the garden marked the beginning of an experiential separation from the openness of communication with God with the exception of particular individuals such as Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and Moses (e.g. Exod 3:5-6), among others, who enjoyed direct conversation with God. Christians recognize the eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6) as the catalyzation of this separation known as original sin into the world and having been imputed on mankind (Rom 5:12). In this newly diminished state, God's face is said to be hidden from mankind because of these iniquities though no shortfall on God's side of the relationship (Isa 59:1-2). James (1997) referred to individuals with a full appreciation of the evil

behind this separation as those with a sick soul. The separation might be the precipitant for the craving for alcohol, which Carl Jung called "a low-level thirst for God" (Jung, 1961, p.1).

The biblical records related to Abraham describe a relationship between him and God in which, at age 75, God called him to leave his homeland (Gen 12:1) and promised to establish him into a great nation (Gen 12:2). This theophanic contact was followed later through contact in a vision telling him not to be afraid and assuring him that God would be his great reward, which establishes a covenantal relationship between the two (Gen 15:1). Abraham's response to God's covenant was to believe Him, an act of faith, which was credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Faith is biblically instantiated as pleasing to God (see also Heb 11:6) and requisite to the right response of human beings to God, which becomes foundational to the later manner in which human beings relate to the creator.

Moses was a biblical figure with whom God also had substantive contact as the supreme Deity established a relationship with His chosen people of Israel (Deut 7:6). In appointing Moses to lead this group, God spoke first through an angel appearing to him in a burning bush (Exod 3:2). This encounter was described initially as an angel appearing and seems to transition to direct contact with God as evidenced by Him speaking directly to Moses (Exod 3:4) and instructing him that he was on Holy ground (Exod 3:5). Moses was afraid to look at God (Exod 3:6). This happenstance was the first of several contacts between God and Moses through which the deliverance of God's people from Egypt (Exod 9:1), the establishment of the law (Exod 20:1-17), and the building of the tabernacle (Exod 25:9) were achieved.

The construction of the tabernacle remains notable in that it established a dwelling place for God in the midst of the people of Israel (Exod 40:35). Contact with God, however, was limited to priests who could enter the holiest of holies once per year (Lev16:29). However, this

move sharply contrasts with the directness of contact described previously or that witnessed in through prophets and in believers since the day of Pentecost (1 Pet 2:9). The tabernacle and surrounding laws related to entering the veil (Leviticus 16) formalized in writing the inability of most human beings at that time to enjoy CCWG and the related imposition of requirements for sacrifice to be made right before God (Leviticus 16).  The nature of contact with God available to people during this period was not entirely made clear biblically, despite knowing that the directness of experiencing God was blocked by the veil (Leviticus 16). A broader conception of CCWG could include the ability to set one's thoughts on God, to praise Him, and to sing songs of worship. In this sense, some conscious contact could be said to have remained for example in the singing of psalms by the Israelites, despite the inability to enjoy the direct presence of God.

**Prophets and Psalmists and Contact with God.** There were select people in the Old Testament who were able to have CCWG directly. This inexhaustive description highlights some aspects of the nature of CCWG for these individuals and its role in the unfolding biblical narrative. In a broad sense, the CCWG of the prophets could be thought of as means through which they communicated the words of God (Exod 7:1; Jer 1:9). Whereas psalmists directed their communication towards God in praise (e.g. Psalm 145:9), lamented (e.g. Ps 130:1), and expressed thanksgiving (e.g. Ps 34:1), and confidence (e.g. Psalm 23).

Prophets as described in the Bible were intermediaries between God and Israel, though prophesy itself was not limited to Israel or Judeo-Christian history (Reddit, 2008).  According to Reddit (2008) other traditions of the far east during biblical times wherein prophets would act as mediums, sometimes believing they were possessed by the divine in order to deliver their messages to their audience. The Judeo-Christian history  recognized in the Old (Deut13:1-5) and New Testaments (Matt 24:24; Acts 20:30) the existence of other, false prophets who either speak

for other gods or falsely claim to speak in the name of God, both of which were subject to death under Old Testament Jewish law (Deut 18:20-22). The biblical understanding of the source of a prophet's access to divine revelation is through the Holy Spirit present within them (1 Sam 10:5-6). This communication might be directly (Isa 7:14-16) or indirectly through a dream or vision (Gen 37:5). The most consequential content of Old Testament biblical prophecies was the telling of the coming of Messiah (e.g. Ps 16:8-11; Jer 31:31; Ps 22:1-31). This divine revelation was noted by Taylor (2016) as characteristic of Christian and Jewish mystical traditions as well as within other mystical systems.

**Reconciliation.** The birth of Jesus Christ is the history-changing event, which sparked the New Testament as He arrives definitively as the prophesied Messiah who would indeed save the world (Matt 16:15-17). This occurrence delineated God's new way of communicating with His people, distinct from using prophets in the past (Heb 1:1-2). Salvation is understood in terms of reconciling and restoring the relationship between God and mankind (2 Cor 5:18-19), which is accomplished by God's grace (Eph 2:8-9) through believing that Jesus is Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9; Eph 2:8-9). Taylor (2016) noted that the union (or reunion) between people and God remains present in Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as other religions.

After the time of His resurrection and as Jesus Christ had promised (John 14:26), the Holy Spirit filled human beings following their faith and as a guarantee (Eph 1:14) or down payment (Eph1:14) of the future inheritance of Christians. James (1997) reported that for the so called sick-souled individuals, the conversion experience associated with reconciliation was the only curative experience for their condition and that it could be accomplished through a second birth process referred to by Jesus Christ in John 3:3. Spirituality has been demonstrated in

clinical research to be negatively correlated to alcohol consumption (Churakova et al., 2017),

perhaps suggesting a quenching of the "low-level thirst for God" suggested by Jung (1961, p.1).

The Holy Spirit is God's presence, which dwells in the body of believers (1 Cor 3:16; 1

Cor 6:19, 2 Tim 1:14, Eph 5:18, Rom 8:11, Rom 8:9, Gal 4:6, 1 John 2:27). As the Scriptures

demonstrate, the Holy Spirit works in people's lives to teach about all things (1 John 2:27),

remind them of the teachings of Jesus Christ (John 14:26), reveal the deep things of God (1 Cor

2:10-11), give power (Acts 1:8), spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7-11), help and intercession in

weakness (Rom 8:26-27), and rebirth into new life (Tit 3:4-6). The presence of Holy Spirit also

bears spiritual fruits including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-25).

The nature and presence of the Holy Spirit in believers is remarkably important to the

context of the present study in a number of ways. It empowers Christians to experience and

imitate Christ, which Van der Merwe (2018) noted as the predominating elements of a distinctly

Christian spirituality. It also establishes the spiritual milieu in which CCWG is sought and

experienced for Christians practicing step 11 whether in TSPs or CTSPs. Thus, it provides a

backdrop upon which any alternative understandings of CCWG that might arise in TSPs could be

understood. Christians with a lesser understanding of the nature and presence of the Holy Spirit

could be misled by other teachings in myriad ways. Finally, the Holy Spirit is requisite to

discerning the will of God (John 16:13) as is aimed at in the latter portion of step 11 (Alcoholics

Anonymous, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.).

**Social**

There is a sense in modern times in which there seems to be a decreasing emphasis or

complete abandoning in some cases of commitment to shared beliefs reflected in declining

private and public religious participation (Twenge et al., 2016). Alternatively, this trend could be thought of as a consequence of an increasing awareness of the subjectivities of spiritual life echoed in statements like, "God as we understood Him" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981, p.34), which leave open ideas such as the conception of God to private interpretation.

TSPs are most often characterized as spiritual, non-religious (Hahn, 2020) and indeed belief God was not a requirement of participation from the earliest roots of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). Interestingly, this latter source refers to a "loving God", said to express Himself through the "group conscience," as the ultimate authority for AA (p. 132). CCWG could perhaps most easily be thought of in psychological terms as subjective experience of an individual seeking such contact; however, the idea of God working through a group conscience reflects a more communal element relevant to spiritual experiences. Consequently, experiences with religious community have been found to have a strong relationship to human flourishing, which transcends the effects of social support typically found within communities without the religious element (VanderWeele, 2017). There are contrasting outcomes related to religious activity in relation to the similar, but distinctly different concept of religiosity. This term relates to the sense in which one finds value in participating in religious practices and has been positively associated with the experience of shame (Marcinechova & Zahorcova, 2020). However, participating in religious practices is not CCWG though these practices could be used to seek this experience.

The Christian faith as expressed in the New Testament strongly emphasizes the importance of community in the faith in a number of ways. For example, the analogy of the community of Christian believers as comprising the body of Christ with each person being a

member of it (1 Cor 12:27) in which each member, as with parts of the body serves a different function (Rom 12:4-5). In addition, there are a number of appeals from the Apostle Paul to preserve the unity of the faith (1 Cor 1:10) and unity in the spirit (Eph 4:3), which involves various aspects such as living in agreement with one another (2 Cor 13:11). The spiritual unity among Christians also rests on the idea that there is one spirit (Eph 4:4) common to all believers, rather than each person having his own individually. This essential distinction could be confusing because each person's experience of spiritual life is subjective and quite personal. Finally, the communal aspect of Christian life is expressed in the admonition to believers not to avoid the gathering themselves together as this is essential to the mutual encouragement in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25).

**Theoretical**

To understand CCWG as a phenomenon of interest, it was necessary to examine relevant consciousness literature to explicate the present theoretical viewpoints related to the nature of subjective experiences elicited by controlling attention and awareness. Graziano (2021) argued against the so-called hard problem, which asserts that subjective feelings arising as a result of attending to something were non-physical and distinct from the brain itself. In terms of this study, the hard-problem view entails one's subjective feelings that might arise from contact with God through prayer and meditation being private events inaccessible to scientific inquiry. Graziano's (2021) case against this view rests on the arguably erroneous idea that perception derives only from information in the brain. There seems to be scientific certainty with respect to a correlation between perception and information in the brain, but evidence for a causal link is weakened by the inability to identify a brain location responsible for the origination of attention and volition. The countervailing view is the presence of a non-physical reality such as the soul,

which interacts with the physical apparatus of the brain to create one's perceptual reality (Ceylan et al., 2017).

While Graziano (2021) argued for the physical reducibility of subjective feelings, at least two other theories of consciousness present the contravening view rooted in Cartesian dualism, which holds that the brain produces non-physical experiences beyond the reach of science. The global workspace theory (GWT) as one example argues that brain processing results from a series of integrated brain structures (Gustavo et al., 2021) whereas Lau and Rosenthal (2011) described higher order thought (HOT) theory, noting that conscious awareness depends on higher order thinking about oneself as being in a particular mental state. The irreducibility of subjective experience resulting from these theories appears untenable to Graziano (2021) whose case for attention-schema theory (AST) holds that the brain controls attention based on self-updating models of attention required to steer attention. AST seems to rely on unsupported assumptions about these models without explaining the origin of attention or how the brain 'decides' how to steer attention from one thing to the next.

Linkage between the experience of spiritual struggles and addictive behaviors has been established, including a noted decrease in problematic gambling behaviors, which occurred after diminished spiritual struggles (Gutierrez et al., 2020). The relationship between addiction recovery and spiritual health and pathology is essential to understanding and evaluating TSPs in terms of their efficacy and for understanding the experiences, motivations, and other lived experiences of those who engage in spiritual practices for relief from these conditions. Modern participants of these programs might be more likely to include a blend of ideas about the brain disease model of addiction as well as spiritual explanations for their struggles and recovery when discussing their lived experiences (Kime, 2018). CTSPs are among a lesser studied, Christian-

specific set of spiritual interventions aimed at reducing addictive behaviors such as bible

journaling (Dillon, 2021).

God attachment is a theoretical area germane to the present research in that its study

emphasizes the nature of an individual's attachment to God (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018) by

building on the work done by Bowlby (1969) related to infant-caregiver attachment. The

extension of this work into God attachment bears particular relevance due to the framing of the

relationship between adherents to religion as father-child, particularly in the Judeo-Christian

tradition (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018). In the context of the present study, the quality of the

attachment between TSP and CTSP participants and God might be reflected in their descriptions

of their lived experiences with prayer and meditation and might play a role in the extent to which

they experience psychological well-being or recovery from addiction.  Differences observed in

descriptions of lived experiences with conscious contact with God might be mediated by

attachment style with God. Prayer was demonstrated to be associated with improved

psychological well-being in securely God-attached individuals but not in those with insecure

God-attachment (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018). Fairbairn et al. (2018) established a strong

association between insecure attachment styles and substance use. Nevertheless, Kerlin (2020)

demonstrated that God-attachment could foster improvement towards increased security during

addiction treatment, resulting in improved outcomes for participants.

**Situation to Self**

The motivation for conducting this study arose largely from profound personal

experiences of conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening, the observation of

substantive differences in other people's experience of these phenomena, and the potential for

differences between Christian and other experiential conceptions of these phenomena as relates

to TSP participation. My own experiences through prayer and meditation have resulted in immensely meaningful, even transformational experiences, which involved dramatic shifts in state of consciousness. In communicating with others about these experiences, I observed that there were a wide range of descriptions, some of which were markedly different, though nonetheless quite meaningful to each person. This realization led me to wonder how others would describe their experiences, as well as to learn how they derive meaning from them. As a Christian participating in a TSP, I came to understand that my spiritual experiences of contact with God had to be understood in terms of the Bible. Without such a grounding framework, other participants of TSPs seemed left open to creating their own explanations or engaging New Age or other conceptions of God. Although I was comfortable coexisting within the TSP as a Christian, I wondered if other Christians with less fidelity to or understanding of the Bible could be misled as to the nature of conscious contact with God, prayer, mediation, and the TS as a whole.

The interpretive framework of my study is largely pragmatic in that it recognizes reality as accessible through many forms of inquiry. It is grounded on the influence of values in research though with some paradigmatic elements of postpositivism in my belief that there is an objective reality shared, perhaps impossible to fully understand from an individual perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My axiological presuppositions are theistic, rooted in the Christian faith as described in the Bible. This means that I understand that experience with these phenomena is accountable to being biblically corroborated and understood in order to be considered and properly integrated psychologically.

My view is tempered by pragmatism in that I recognize not all Christians experience these phenomena similarly or relate to the Bible in this way. In addition, I appreciate

Trueblood's (1957) assertion that religious experience is not predominantly about propositions about God as much as experiences of the presence of God. In this sense I straddle a dialectical tension between an importance of biblical touchpoints for spiritual experiences while recognizing the substantial limitations of our full understanding of biblical texts such that many reported experiences might only appear inconsistent with biblical teaching while not actually violating its objective truth. Although I identify as Christian, I also resonate with the spiritual non-religious category as some of Ammerman's (2013) participants did as a rejection of certain types of religiosities, particularly those which make an idol of dogma without apprehending the underlying truths therein.

## Problem Statement

The problem is a lack of literature examining the experiences of Christians with contact with God through prayer and meditation as well as with spiritual awakenings. Despite growing research on AA, within which these phenomena are structurally embedded, most recovery literature has been quantitative and clinical (Dossett & Metcalf-White, 2020). Thus, there was a gap in terms of understanding the subjective, lived-experiences of individuals. Despite growing literature on spirituality in TSP (Bell et al., 2022; Bluma, 2018; Volenik, 2021), there remains a dearth of qualitative scholarly work on these divine experiences or those specific to Christians.

Existing studies of prayer and meditation tend to focus on the efficacy of these practices in terms of achieving specific outcomes such as reducing anxiety (Ahmadi et al., 2019) and reducing negative thinking (Knabb et al., 2020). These studies often fail to distinguish the specific faith of the participants or to account for variables such as the contents of their prayers and the deity to whom prayers are being addressed (Andrade & Radhakrishnan, 2009; Rauser, 2019). This aspect assumes a certain homogeneity of experiences with these practices between

persons of different faiths that is not warranted as well as failing to address potential within-group differences in prayer types and content among members of the same religion. The present study gathers first-hand accounts from Christians using qualitative methodology to broaden the scholarly understanding of this phenomenon within this subset of TSP participants.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe CCWG including spiritual awakenings, or awakening experiences (AE) for Christians participating in TSPs and CTSPs. CCWG would be generally defined for the purposes of this study as the subjective awareness of one's reciprocal communication of information with God. AE could be defined as, "powerful and transcendent experiences that profoundly affect the individual" (de Castro, 2017, p. 34). The theory guiding this study is rooted in existential therapy, which holds that incumbent anxieties of life are best attenuated by deriving meaning from one's lived experience (May, 1996) and is examined through the theoretical methodology of phenomenology as originated by the philosopher Edmund Husserl as described in Moustakas (1994).

The nature of CCWG has been characterized in many ways throughout the study of these various types of spiritual experiences. This contact can be through the practices of prayer and meditation as is described in this study but can also be thought of as any spiritual experience one has since these experiences are known through consciousness. Even spiritual awakenings which are also being studied can be thought of as examples of CCWG, though more specific in their nature as discrete and episodic events. Prayer and meditation similarly have many understandings depending on the religious or spiritual background of those engaging in the practices. This study looked at the specific experiences of Christians in TSPs with these practices.

**Significance of the Study**

This study adds to the scholarly body of knowledge about the unique lived experiences of a sample of Christians in terms of their relationships with God including how they engage in prayer and meditation. It contributes to literature about the subjective experience of communication with God as well as what meaning they derive from it.  States of consciousness involved with spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation have been both studied in terms of efficacy, in particular, well-being outcomes (Ahmadi et al., 2019; Knabb, 2021) as well as looking at neurological correlates of spiritual practices (Klemm, 2020).  Additional work has been done on awakening experiences (AE), which are profound, meaningful, often life changing experiences which often occur as a result of states of consciousness induced by prayer and meditation (de Castro, 2017). Bell et al. (2022) and Corneille and Luke (2021) studied AE in the context of the recovery field. Qualitative work has also been done by Casey (2019) on Muslim AEs, yet no studies could be identified for Christians with the phenomenon of AE or more ordinary prayer and meditative states as vehicles of contact with God. The present study aimed to give voice to Christians within the recovery milieu as to their experiences with these phenomena.

This study can advance the existential theory by increasing understanding with respect to how Christians make meaning of their experiences with these phenomena and how that contributes to a lessening of their anxiety.  May (1996) states that this theory holds that increasing a personal sense of meaning contributes to the lessening of individual anxiety.  This research could advance our understanding to the extent that participants describe their experiences with meaning and any subsequent changes in anxiety.  The transpersonal theory could be advanced through confirming the value of spiritual awakenings in a growth context.

This study also bears significance for Christians involved in TSPs and CTSPs in terms of understanding the qualitative differences that might exist in their experience of conscious contact with God. The results might also help inform recovery professionals and supports as to the unique spiritual landscape of Christians, which might result in a more client-centered and culturally informed quality of care for Christians in recovery. This is of essential significance given the ethical responsibility expected by professionals in counseling and related fields on being culturally informed as to the specific worldview and experiences of clients, which might impact their counseling goals or process (American Counseling Association, 2014; American Psychological Association, 2017).

## Research Questions

### Research Question 1

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experience of conscious contact with God?

This question adds qualitative knowledge related to the lived experiences of Christians with this phenomenon, which expands knowledge beyond its present limitations such as examination of neurological correlates of spiritual experience (Klemm, 2020).

### Research Question 2

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experiences of prayer and meditation and the relationship of these practices to conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening?"

This question extends beyond the quantitative work of Ahmadi et al. (2019) and Knabb (2021) involving a more detailed look at the nature of these experiences versus the existing outcome-related literature.

**Research Question 3**

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe spiritual awakening, as described in step twelve?

This study fills the gap in literature involving a lack of qualitative inquiry into Christians' experiences with spiritual awakening and adds to early work in these areas involving the Muslim population (Casey, 2019).

<div align="center">

**Definitions**

</div>

1. *Conscious Contact with God (CCWG)* - The process of communicating with God through prayer and meditation to experience His grace, wisdom, and love (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1981).

2. *Meditation* - "The term meditation refers to a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, p. 228). Deshmukh (2006, p. 2239) stated, "meditation is an art of being serene and alert in the present moment, instead of constantly struggling to change or to become."

3. *Prayer* - *"*Every kind of inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine" (James, 1997, p. 486).

4. *Spiritual Awakening/Awakening Experience (AE)* **-** An experience in which one, "has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone.  He has been granted a gift which amounts to a

new state of consciousness and being" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc.,

1981, p. 106-107).  Alternatively, de Castro (2017) defined it as,

Awakening experiences are powerful and transcendent experiences that profoundly affect

the individual. There appears to be an essential core experience of oneness. It is

experienced as a completely subjective phenomenon where awareness contains reality

and the notions of an external reality, and a separate self are perceived as delusions (p.

34).

5. *Spontaneous Spiritual Awakenings (SSAs)* **-** According to Corneille and Luke (2021,

   p. 1) SSAs is the "subjective experiences characterized by a sudden sense of direct

   contact, union, or complete nondual merging (experience of oneness) with a

   perceived ultimate reality, the universe, "God," or the divine."

## Summary

The present study is a nascent foray of scholarly inquiry into the unique experiences of

Christians in CTSPs with communication with God and its concomitant elements of prayer,

mediation, and spiritual awakenings.  This study fills a twofold gap including an absence of

Christian perspective evidenced in an already depleted literature, which gave little attention to

TSP participants' experiences with these phenomena. The purpose is to expand the scholarly

body of knowledge in such a way as to enrich a broad range of community stakeholders

including participants, families, supportive others, service providers, and community support

groups as to the particularities of Christian voices in recovery and the qualitative distinctions

which characterize their spirituality that may emerge.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The study of spiritual matters within scientific research literature has spanned many decades and varied in terms of its purpose, complexity, and execution. There has been research examining spiritual practices, experiences, and outcomes in various contexts, as well as associations between spiritual practices or experiences and particular physical or psychological health benefits. The study of spirituality is challenged by the lack of a cohesive operational definition of spirituality that could account for the broad spectrum of experiences reported by individuals including those which intersect with traditional religion and religious understandings of spiritual phenomena.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in existential therapy, transpersonal therapy, and biblical Christianity. There are significant areas of conceptual overlap between these perspectives beginning with the emphasis on aspects of humanity, which transcend one's individual psychology while recognizing the role of the individual's participation in the process of personal or spiritual growth. Each of these worldviews offers perspective on the nature, course, and remedies for human suffering in some similar and yet quite different ways from each other. Each of these areas were examined separately and the existential and transpersonal approaches each contrasted with the biblical perspective since the latter was the foundation of the present study.

### Existential Therapy

Deriving from existential philosophy, Rollo May (1996) developed existential therapy and emphasizes addressing the anxieties and challenges of life by creating meaning and

connectedness to lived experience. The present study is rooted in these ideas in that the goal was to determine the meaning participants derive from their prayer and meditation practices in terms of achieving CCWG. Meaning is particularly relevant to the substance-using population targeted by TSP in that low levels of meaning have been associated with the use of substances as a coping mechanism (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). Csabonyi and Phillips (2020) also found a link between a low presence of meaning and increased drug/alcohol use and that the relationship was mediated by boredom. Connection with lived experience was built into the interpretive phenomenology method used in this study. Existential therapy seeks to understand the client's own world and the capacities they bring to therapy (Pitchford, 2009). This study sought to access the participants' own spiritual and psychological world by using interviews, which also identified capacities for resilience and recovery brought about through spiritual practices and relationship with God.

Existential therapy consists of six propositions about human beings including: the inherent capacity for self-awareness, free will that must be tempered by responsibility, unique personal identity which must be known through relationship to others, anxiety as a fundamental part of the human condition, death as a basic condition giving meaning to life, and the need for humans to continuously recreate themselves because meaning in life is never fixed (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). This study is grounded in these propositions, which express the capacity for participants to reflect on their own spiritual life (self-awareness) through exercising their will voluntarily to seek the will of God through prayer and meditation (responsibility) through which they could improve their relationship with others and God in the case of step eleven.

**Transpersonal Therapy**

Transpersonal therapy is derived in part from existential and humanistic therapies and could be thought of as a bridge between psychological and spiritual practice. This approach recognizes the human inclination towards unity, ultimate truth, freedom, and the potential for growth expressed in "peak" experiences and other changes in consciousness (Wittine, 1989). The present study is grounded in the idea that the TS are fundamentally a process of spiritual growth wherein the search for truth is found in step two which says, "we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). Step eleven emphasizes the CCWG through which the potential for "peak" experiences and shifts in consciousness. Not all aspects of transpersonal therapy align with the TS, including its emphasis on self, however, one of the core postulates involves spiritual awakening from a limited personal identity (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). This notion aligns with the twelfth step which says, "having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs" (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). The limited personal identity aspect being overcome by TS participants is expressed in step 1 which reads, "we admitted we were powerless over alcohol, and that our lives had become unmanageable" (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.).

**Biblical Perspective**

Though not a psychological or counseling related theory per se, biblical Christianity is a framework embedded in the TSP and fundamental to the present study. The biblical call for Christians to improve CCWG is expressed variously the Bible including in Jas 4:8 which reads, "draw near to God and he will draw near to you." Likewise, using prayer for this and other ends is addressed several times in the Bible (e.g. 2 Chron 7:14; Eph 6:18; Jer 29:12; Job 22:27; Jas

5:13; Mark 11:24, ESV). The biblical emphasis on meditation is considerably less than that of prayer, however there are a number of references to it (e.g. Josh 1:8; Isa 26:3; Ps 1:2; Ps 4:4). The biblical framework for experiencing the TSP is foundational to the grounding of this study. It was rooted in the assumption that the ways in which the Christian participants experience the TSP was impacted by their understanding of scripture and a biblical understanding of matters such as prayer, meditation, conscious contact or relationship with God, and the discernment of His will for their lives.

### *Existential Therapy and Biblical Christianity*

Existential therapy and its related concepts have a number of things in common with biblical Christianity including its emphasis on the necessary tension between free will and responsibility, the essentiality of anxiety to the human condition, and the proposition that death is a basic component of what gives meaning to life (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). The existence of free will in human beings is evident early in the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve where shortly after creation God described the freedom to choose from any of the fruits of the garden to eat with the exception of one, which if eaten, would surely cause death (Gen 2:16). This might be the first example of this tension between the freedom of choice with the concomitant responsibility to act in accordance with God's commands.

The New Testament provides additional evidence of this aspect in Gal 5:13, which reads, "For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love (NLT). Here is an example of the freedom in Christ followed directly by a prohibitional command restricting that freedom within particular bounds. Similarly, 1 Pet 2:16 states, "Live as

people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God"
(ESV), reflecting the need to restrain one's freedom by avoiding evil and choosing to serve God.

Anxiety as a fundamental part of the human condition is another aspect of existentialism
that coincides with the biblical narrative beginning with the creation story in Genesis where the
human experience moves from paradisal in the Garden of Eden to one characterized by anxiety
about facing God, which caused Adam and Eve to hide from Him (Gen 3:8). Though not part of
God's original design, anxiety has clearly been with humanity due to the original act of
disobedience leading to the fall of mankind from relationship with God. The ubiquity of anxiety
in human experience is reflected in the acknowledgement of powerlessness present in the first
step of the TSP. Much of the struggle to accept the powerless, which is the stated aim of step 1,
seems to lie in anxiety about things one cannot control. Mandelkow et al. (2021) discussed the
integration of spiritual matters into existential therapy and identified various overlaps for
participants into issues of meaning and the sensitivity around self-disclosure of spiritual
experience in therapy and ethical concerns emerging from it.

Finding meaning in life through the reality of death is an existential idea (Center for
Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999), which is aligns with the biblical narrative. Although not the
primary source of meaning according to biblical teaching, the finality of this life is held in
tension with one's fate in eternity. The prospect of death propels Christians to make the most of
the time here on earth to carry out the will of God (Eph 5:16). The reality of death coupled with
the inherent anxiety of life help to explain the nature of human suffering from which Christians
recognize the need for a transcendent solution in being saved from the fallen state.

*Transpersonal Therapy and Biblical Christianity*

The transpersonal approach has the least alignment with the biblical Christianity perspectives that serve to ground this study. However, one core area of agreement lies in the transpersonal postulate that transpersonal therapy is a process of awakening from a limited personal identity to a universal awareness of self (Wittine, 1989). Biblical Christianity involves recognition of a limited personal identity in its concept of original sin which describes the inability of human beings to know God and escape their sinful nature without faith in Jesus Christ as the one who reconciles human beings back to God the Father (2 Cor 5:18). The idea is further expressed in the distinction and conflict between the sinful nature and the spiritual nature available by faith (Gal 5:17). Although the Bible does not refer to this process as an awakening, Christians have understood it as a progressive sanctification process, which involves believers becoming more holy. This could be likened to an awakening to a universal awareness, though unlike the transpersonal postulate, not an awareness merely of self, but rather an awareness of oneself in relationship with God.

Transpersonal therapy also shares various technical similarities with biblical Christianity in terms of its approach to change including meditation and loving service (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999). Loving service is an essential aspect of biblical Christianity both towards God and towards others (Matt 22:36-40). The purpose of these activities in each approach raises a sharp contrast in that transpersonal therapy techniques aim at  attaining a positive change as with any therapeutic technique. Whereas in Biblical Christianity, they are pursued as a result of a positive change that has already taken place. This change for the Christian is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit whose presence produces love as well as a number of other positive attributes (Gal 5:22-23). In a practice common to the TS, Christians engage in

meditation and prayer to improve their connection to God, which might produce positive experiential results in one's life without necessarily being the primary motivation.

Tisdale (1994) outlined four areas of convergence between the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God and transpersonal therapy including: emphasis on the role of consciousness, the requirement for personal transformation, Jesus' trust that growth processes would continue once begun, and the recognition of self-centeredness as the primary obstacle to change. Transformation and renewal of mind (consciousness) are highlighted sharply in Rom 12:2 which states, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be 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 verse even establishes the biblical link with step eleven of the TS which states the aim of CCWG being to accurately ascertain the will of God (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). Tisdale's (1994) reference to Jesus' trust in the processes of growth could be understood in terms of His trust in God's grace and faithfulness in answering His prayer for the Holy Spirit to come to believers (John 14:16). This could further be understood as His trust in the process of progressive sanctification which, fueled by faith, was mediated by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian believer.

Furthermore, Tisdale (1994) provided a fundamental area of divergence in that Jesus Christ's teaching about the Kingdom of God did not seem to emphasize a particular set of disciplines or techniques for entering the Kingdom. This stands to reason since the Christian transformation is a relational to becoming children of God (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:5) and enjoying loving relationship with Him (John 17:3). Although there are technical aspects of building and maintaining relationships, they are neither the point nor the motivation, but rather the desire for connection, intimacy, and love.

**Related Literature**

The literature reviewed here includes the topics of Twelve Step Programs (TSP), spirituality in treatment and recovery as well as prayer, meditation, and CCWG. The TSP literature includes research on the effectiveness of TSP in recovery from substance use disorders (Humphreys et al., 2020). It focused on attributes of TSP attendees and relationships with spiritual concepts such as the higher power (Volenik, 2021). The spirituality literature widely varied and included studies related to specific spiritual experiences and practices with various types of participants and settings. The body of research on prayer largely focused on efficacy in achieving particular physical and mental health outcomes.  Similarly, meditation research was largely focused on efficacy in these domains though it also included works looking at the experiential aspects of the practice.

## Twelve Step Programs (TSPs)

There is a growing body of research examining the efficacy of Twelve Step programs in helping individuals recover from a variety of substances and other related disorders. Humphreys et al. (2020) studied a diverse group of 1,730 substance users and found that Twelve Step group participation was associated with reduced drug and alcohol use and fewer drug use related problems. Kelly (2017) reviewed 25 years of AA research and concluded that TSP was an effective clinical and public health intervention, which could be easily accessible to local communities. AA involvement has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on drinking outcomes as well as being predictive of increases in private religious practices, daily spiritual experiences, and forgiveness of others (Krentzman et al., 2013).

### *TSP and Spirituality*

The history of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is based largely on the spiritual experiences of two of its founders, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, who had each recounted different types of spiritual awakenings. These men derived the principles of AA from a religious group called the Oxford group and based the idea for their group at least in part on the work of psychologist William James (Feigenbaum, 2013). Although Bill Wilson's spiritual experience was definitively Christian (Dossett, 2013), the influence of William James on the group's foundation could be seen in its wariness of organized religion and insistence on independence from outside influences (Cook et al., 2010). It is noteworthy that both of these founders had remained unable to stay sober despite their Christian faith, which changed only after they began to work with other alcoholics in efforts to help others obtain sobriety (Dick, 1992). This type of outreach went on to become the basis of the twelfth step in AA, which involves helping other alcoholics achieve and maintain sobriety (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981.

The spirituality of TSPs is marked by direct spiritual experiences as specified in steps two, three, 11 and 12, of which the latter two emphasize CCWG and spiritual awakening respectively (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981).  Volenik (2021) identified three marked spiritual influences in the development of AA including the work of Carl Jung, the Oxford Group as promoted by the Lutheran Roots of Pennsylvania pastor, Frank Buchman, and William James' book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Jung was responsible for referring one of Alcoholics Anonymous' earliest members, Rowland Hazard, a patient he had unsuccessfully treated for alcoholism resulting in Jung's conclusion that the patient should seek a spiritual experience (Volenik, 2021). Although not overtly Christian, Jung recognized Christianity as his starting point for spirituality and often quoted the Bible. Despite its clearly

Christian-influenced roots, Alcoholics Anonymous went on to develop its own separate and distinct form of spirituality emphasizing the personal relationship with God, catalyzed by the acknowledgement of one's own powerlessness (Volenik, 2021). While that idea aligns with Christianity in its recognition of the insufficiency of human effort towards salvation (Rom 5:6), the most prominent distinction between Alcoholics Anonymous and Christianity is that it does not recognize Jesus Christ as the higher power through which one is delivered from the bondage of sin (John 14:6). This notion remains salient at least in the sense that it presents a potential obstacle for Christians participating in TSPs in their effort to relate to a fellowship of individuals without the same defined higher power, which could threaten their own spiritual security in terms of what they believe or concern them about the morality underlying the spirituality of the group in terms of its bend towards good or evil.

The idea of a willing self-surrender to the control of a higher power by William James (James, 1997) parallels step three of the TSP which describes making a decision to turn one's life over to the care of God (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). William James listed this as a characteristic of saintliness, which he described rather vaguely as one who had a habitual experience of spiritual emotions (James, 1997). He also listed among these characteristics an immense sense of elation and freedom, which could be likened to the step 12 idea of spiritual awakening (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). Regardless of the particularities of the spiritual origins of TSPs, researchers took a more active interest in recent years in the potential benefits to participants of spirituality in recovery. Bell et al. (2022) looked at participants involved in residential substance use treatment who had reported having had a spiritual awakening and found that among those who had, there was greater self-efficacy, hope, and affiliation with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Those participants were also found to be less

likely to have a negative exit from the residential facility. Among the lived experiences of male TSP participants in one sample, themes of belonging, care, authenticity, and love emerged with increases reported as the length of program involvement increased (Rodriguez-Morales, 2020).

Spirituality and private religious practices at least once per week were reported by 73.7% of AA participants in one study, though no differences were found in attitudes about alcohol or abstinence between those with high or low spirituality (Bluma, 2018). Celebrate Recovery (CR) is a Christian Twelve Step Program (CTSP), which is derivative of AA and whose members have been demonstrated to have increased confidence in resisting substance use (self-efficacy), which was associated with increased spirituality. In fact, for every unit of increased spirituality, the odds of being above the median for self-efficacy in CR participants increased 9% (Brown et al., 2013).

Arnaud (2015) found that AA members experience higher power (HP) as central to sobriety independent of previous religious/spiritual backgrounds and that the experiential relationship with HP gave meaning to their lives beyond personal identity. These results also showed that majority of the AA members experienced HP as love and identified strong similarities between AA membership and being a believer in a faith community, due to the centrality of HP in the program. One systematic review and meta-analysis of 20 studies totaling ($n$=3700) participants found that Twelve Step programs were significantly effective in reducing substance use (Hai et al., 2019). Despite a growing body of research on Twelve Step programs, a number of issues make empirical research in this area difficult including the heterogeneity of spiritual experiences (Ghahremani, 2017). This confounds research because of differences based on religious affiliation as well as within-group differences among individuals within the same religion.

**Christian Twelve Step Program (CTSP)**

One area that has been largely absent from the research has been CTSPs such as "celebrate recovery and life recovery" among others. Few researchers such as Shim (2021) explored the suitability of these groups for recovery as well as the Twelve Steps based on biblical principles. The importance of this gap in the literature is potentially quite large given that less than 10% of individuals with a past year substance use disorder (SUD) seek treatment for it (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Although CTSPs and TSPs are not in themselves treatment, the data on the low numbers of treatment seekers reflects a need to identify and overcome obstacles that may inhibit individuals struggling with SUDs from getting help. One such potential barrier to help-seeking by Christians with SUDs is a perception of incompatibility of traditional TSPs with their understanding and practice of the Christian faith.

*Differences Between TSPs and CTSPs*

Though researchers like McInerney and Cross (2021) explored themes of secular spirituality among TSP participants, few studies addressed Christian experiences in these programs. One hallmark difference between the spirituality of AA and that of Christian TSPs is in step 3, which refers to God "as we understood him" (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.) whereas in CTSPs this phrase is omitted (Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery Groups, n.d.). There are a number of possible reasons for the differences reflected in this step between these two programs including disparate understandings of God among CTSP participants, which is less prone to a subjective or personal definition. Belief in God is highly prevalent in TSP, with 98% of Narcotics Anonymous (NA) participants reporting this belief explicitly or in some other higher power compared to 89% of a probability sample of the U.S. population (Galanter et al., 2020), but the exact nature of that belief in these populations was not as clear. Another difference is that

for Christians, the God to whom one's life is turned over is not a matter of one's personal perceptual subjectivity, but one who is defined in the Bible. Christians vary in the extent to which they recognize the authority of the Bible and its exclusivity as the source of information about God and other spiritual matters. Despite this variability in the reliance on the Bible to shape Christians' understanding, this difference in step three results from an underlying recognition that God has an identity that transcends one's personal understanding.

For Christians committed to the authority of the Bible, the differences become more distinct throughout the other steps as well because there are corresponding biblical passages, which apply to each of the steps and thus shape the Christians' understanding and practice of that step (Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). Fully explicating the biblical roots of each step is beyond the scope of this review but a general understanding the biblical correlates to each step was essential to understanding practical barriers that might exist for Christians who approach TSPs. These differences need not be understood as absolute in the sense that they necessarily preclude Christians from participating in traditional TSPs, but that they present a potential obstacle to embracing the ideas presented, particularly if they were unaware of the biblical roots of each step.

Further complicating the research on the spiritual domain is the instability in definitions across studies of terms such as religion, spiritual, non-religion, and secular, which has led to a call for further analysis of these terms to more accurately understand the experiences of people in recovery (Dossett & Metcalf-White, 2020). The differences between religiosity and spirituality have also been discussed in the literature, with a case being made for the potential for significant differences between TSP participants in terms of beliefs, values, and their expression (Aldiqs & Hamdan-Mansour, 2021). Beyond the broad experience of spirituality in the programs by

participants, researchers such as Wnuk (2021) found that particular spiritual mechanisms led to reduced feelings of hopelessness and that a sense of meaning in life moderated the relationship between hope and hopelessness. The mechanisms of hope, was operationalized in part by Wnuk as a life force characterized by a confident expectation of achieving realistic and meaningful goals. Herein lies a gap between understanding traditional TSP participants' experiences versus that of Christians in that the object of hope for Christians is God Himself, particularly His nature as faithful (1 Cor 1:9) and promises to believers (Matt 11:28-29; 1 Thess 5:1-3). The confident expectation concept of Wnuk (2021) could be likened to the biblical definition of faith provided in Heb 11:1, which includes confidence in what cannot yet be seen.

### Christian Compatibility with TSP

Understanding the compatibility or lack thereof between TSPs and CTSPs was essential in terms of understanding the rationale for present study in that it would raise salient differences that could impact Christians approaching TSPs and further support the development of CTSPs. Here the history of TSPs in relation to Christianity was briefly explored as well as an overview of the biblical underpinnings for each step as well as analysis of its TSP-CTSP compatibility. The biblical references were drawn in part from "life recovery and celebrate recovery," which match on the primary scripture reference on each step except step 11, though life recovery has additional references listed for each step (Life Recovery, n.d.).

### History of TSP in Relation to Christianity

The historical origins of TSPs, particularly AA, are rooted in part in Christian teaching, with the first two years being characterized by an exclusively Protestant focus followed shortly by the group's first Catholic member and subsequent warm reception by local Catholic leadership (Volenik, 2021). Early in the evolution of AA, however, the decision was made to

deemphasize the biblical and Christian aspects of the program to better appeal to prospective agnostic and atheist participants who may have been deterred from the program due to religiously prescribed notions of spirituality that did not align with their worldview (Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book, 2002).

**Step One.** The first step of AA reads, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives have become unmanageable" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 21). Life Recovery's step one is identical except that it replaces the word alcohol with the phrase, "our problems" (Life Recovery, n.d., The 12 Steps), which is done throughout the steps. The steps begin with an admission of powerlessness and unmanageability of life problems (Life Recovery, n.d.; Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc., 1981) or over alcohol (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981) or other things such as drugs (Narcotics Anonymous, n.d.) or other specific problems (e.g. Overeaters Anonymous, n.d.). This reflects the Christian understanding of the human condition as one characterized by original sin (Rom 7:18) and bodily weakness, and consequently unable to save himself by his own efforts (Rom 8:3, Eph 2:8).

One aspect of basic compatibility between TSPs and CTSPs could be seen in that they draw the same conclusion of personal inefficacy in this step. However, they have differing explanations in that the former is simply based upon past experiences with it (Alcoholics anonymous big book, 2002) while the latter understands it as endemic to humanity (Rom 5:12). The Christian view could be thought of as less stigmatizing in that it recognizes the universality of sin and the need for divine intervention, whereas the AA tradition may engender a singling out of alcoholics or other groups as uniquely deficient and in need. Christians might have an easier time acknowledging powerlessness, at least on a conceptual level, even though it might not translate into actual behavior change.

**Step Two.** Step two reads, "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" (Life Recovery, n.d.; Alcoholics Anonymous, World Services Inc., 1981, p. 25). In Christian terms, this is the recognition of the saving power of Jesus Christ through faith (believing) (Eph 2:8), which carries with it not only the promise of eternal life (John 3:16) but also the fruits of the spirit which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23), which could be likened to a restoration of sanity. This step illustrates what might be the most glaring incompatibility between TSPs and CTSPs in that in TSPs, the power referenced in the step was left for the participant to define (Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book, 2002). Christians in a TSP context would find a sharp contrast here in that defining this higher power as anything, but God could be viewed as prohibited as a form of idolatry (Exod 20:3).

**Step Three.** Step three in AA reads, "We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him" (Alcoholics Anonymous, World Services Inc., 1981, p. 34) which is the same in Life Recovery except that Life Recovery omits "as we understood him" (Life Recovery, n.d.). Although it could be argued that all people have a unique and limited understanding of God given their inability to fully comprehend God (Isa 55:8-9), Christians do have specific understandings in terms of biblically revealed knowledge of God's nature as spirit (Gen 1:2; John 4:24), love (1 John 4:8), light (1 John 1:5), all powerful (Heb 1:3; Ps 147:5) to name a few. By biblical revelation, Christians have much to base their conception of God on both in terms of what He is and what He is not whereas in the TSP group, Christians would be left to define God in some other way than what has been revealed.

**Step Four.** Step four reads, "We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves," which involves the participant identifying those parts of himself that could be

undesirable and in need of change such as the ways they might behave selfishly or mistreat others (Life Recovery, n.d: Celebrate Recovery, n.d: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 42). The CTSPS in this review share Lam 3:40 as the biblical reference, which reads, "let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord." This verse points to an essential activity of the Christian faith which is to repent or turn away from sinful behavior by turning towards godliness. This concept is made clearer in two additional verses attached to this step by Life Recovery which include Matt 7:1-5 and 2 Cor 7:8-10. In the first of these passages, Jesus Christ spoke words of warning regarding the hypocrisy of finding fault in others while not having attended to the faults of your own, while the second passage emphasizes the benefits of bringing awareness to one's own sin in terms of producing "godly grief," which leads to repentance. The Bible provides Christians with concrete ways to define sinful or immoral behavior, whereas AA promotes the participant, "using his best judgment" to determine what is right and wrong for the purposes of this step (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p.50). The idea that one could accurately discern moral truth is contradictory to biblical teaching which clearly reflects that without the law, what is sinful remains unknown (Rom 7:7). Since one cannot repent from sins he is unaware of, the importance for Christians in having a biblical understanding of these steps becomes even more salient.

      **Step Five.** Having made clear for himself the nature of his wrongs, the participants in this stage, "admit to God, ourselves, and another person the exact nature of our wrongs" (Life Recovery, n.d., Celebrate Recovery, n.d., Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 55). As AA recognized, the value of expressing one's shortcomings to another is an ancient practice and not to AA, but one that had been practiced and valued in each century (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981). Indeed, for Christians, this step addresses a centrally

important activity of the faith which is confession. The CTSPS share Jas 5:16a  as anchoring scripture for this step and it is a direct command to confess one's sins to each other. Life Recovery added Ps 32:1-5, which addresses the necessity of confessing to God, the suffering that results from failing to do so (v. 3), and the forgiveness that results (v.5).

**Step Six.**  This step reads, "We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 63; Celebrate Recovery, n.d., Life Recovery, n.d.). The scriptural anchor of this step is from Jas 4:10 which promises that if one humbles himself before the Lord, he would be exalted.  Here the TSP participant sets the stage to rely on an undefined God to remove his self-defined shortcomings whereas the Christian understands that the nature of this request is based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ in order that one might have access to God (1 John 2:2).

**Step Seven.** Step seven states, "We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 70; Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). The CTSPs reference 1 John 1:9, which communicates God's faithfulness to cleanse believers who have confessed from all unrighteousness. Life Recovery (n.d.) also cited the parable of the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14, which further solidifies the idea that those who are humble enough to acknowledge their shortcomings and subsequent need for God were justified than those who believe they could justify themselves by their own works.  The importance of God's nature and what participants believe is further exemplified in this step because it precedes what they could believe about God's willingness and ability to remove the shortcomings as requested in the step.

**Step Eight.** "We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 1981, p. 77; Celebrate

Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.) is the work of the eighth step. It is based biblically on the golden rule that people should treat others as they would like to be treated from Luke 6:31 (Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.).

**Step Nine.** Step nine says, "We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., p. 83; Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). The shared scriptural reference for this step is Matt 5:23-24 which reads, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." The Bible makes clear here that for Christians, this reconciliation between people was not optional, but rather a condition to be satisfied before coming before God.

**Step 10.** "We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 88; Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.) is the ongoing tasks for participants, which as for a number of other steps, is work that is not fixed in time but rather part of a new way of behaving. The two CTSPs reference 1 Cor 10:12 which says, "Therefore let anyone who things that he stands take heed lest he fall" which speaks to the ongoing humility and the required self-evaluation. Rejoicing in the suffering of trials like admitting our wrongs is supported in Rom 5:3-6 which is listed for this step in Life Recovery (n.d.).

**Step 11.** "We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our CCWG, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 1981, p. 96; Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.) is more of the continuing work participants are urged on towards in step 11. As the present study pertains to

step 11, the biblical applications for that step were thoroughly examined. Step 11 is composed of a threefold aim including: 1) improving CCWG through prayer and meditation, 2) praying for knowledge of God's will, and 3) praying for the power to carry out that will (Life Recovery, n.d.).

As noted throughout this section, CTSPs vary in the particular scriptural references used in each step and given the size and scope of the Bible, it seems reasonable to conclude that many possibilities exist for applying biblical teachings even beyond those used in identified CTSPs to the steps. Step 11 is the only step that does not share at least one verse in common between the two CTSPS discussed. Celebrate Recovery emphasized one verse from Colossians 3:16 (Celebrate Recovery, n.d.) in step 11 whereas Life Recovery underscored Colossians 4:2, Isaiah 40:28-31, and 1 Timothy 4:7-8 (Life Recovery, n.d.). Colossians 4:2 (New Living Translation) includes a command to devote oneself to prayer with an alert mind which aligns with the step 11 admonition to participants to prayer and the specification of an alert mind underlies the meditative aspect of this step. Isaiah 40:28-31 speaks to the step 11 idea of praying for the power to carry out God's will, particularly in verses 29 and 31 (New Living Translation).  1 Timothy 4:7 says "Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly" (New Living Translation), which raises a salient distinction for Christians approaching step 11 in that it makes clear that training in Godliness remains essential. It is further emphasized in the following verse, which states that this training promises benefits in this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8, New Living Translation). Therefore, for Christians, step 11 is not merely about CCWG for its own sake, but that it is part of training oneself in Godliness.

**Step 12.**  The final step says, "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs"

(Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981, p. 106; Celebrate Recovery, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). It presents three key points including: the experience of a spiritual awakening, the need to share the message with others, and the change in lifestyle called for as a result of the changes that have been made. Though not referenced in the CTSPs, the "spiritual awakening" referenced in this step can be likened to the biblical idea of the "new self," which is created to be like God referenced in Eph 4:24. The CTSPs agree on Gal 6:1 which admonishes the spiritual to restore gently those who have fallen into sin. Aligning with the evangelical admonitions of Christianity, Life Recovery (n.d.) referenced Isa 61:1-3, which expresses the call to share the good news to the poor and broken.

## Prayer

### Prayer and Contact with God

Prayer is one of the two components of step 11 of the Twelve Step programs, which is engaged to increase CCWG (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). Prayer has been the subject of a growing body of research including results from neuroimaging work demonstrating the correlation of prayer with activation in the attention and memory centers of the brain as well as reduced cravings for alcohol following prayer (Galanter et al., 2017).

A causal link between prayer and connection to God is made in step 11 of the Twelve Step program, which has been the subject of various prayer related research. Baesler (2002) examined the effect of frequency and type of prayer with the experience of intimacy with God, a concept that could be likened to the 'conscious contact' concept in the Twelve Steps. His results reflected the heterogeneity of prayer experiences in that age was associated with increased frequency of prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and contemplation as well as increases in mystical experiences of the holy/divine during prayer. Age was also found to be

positively associated with positive affect during prayer and perceived intimacy with God.  The

best predictors of intimacy with God for young adults was prayers of thanksgiving whereas for

older adults it was prayers of adoration. These results help to establish an empirical basis

supporting the Twelve Step idea of CCWG.

Jeppsen et al. (2022) also supported the relationship between prayer and closeness with

God, though they found no association between prayer and mental health, with the latter finding

contradicting earlier work by Jeppsen et al. (2015).  This earlier work found that colloquial and

meditative prayer were positively associated with mental health, though petitionary prayers had a

negative association. Both of these articles support the relationship between prayer and closeness

with God.

**Prayer and Attachment**

The personal benefits of closeness to God have also been studied through the lens of

attachment theory to determine if differences in attachment style to God interacts with prayer and

well-being. Secure attachment to God has been shown to be correlated with several indicators of

psychological well-being whereas anxious and avoidant attachment to God has been negatively

correlated with psychological flourishing and life satisfaction (Njus & Scharmer, 2020).

Bradshaw and Kent (2018) found that the relationship between prayer and psychological well-

being later in life was moderated by attachment style, with secure attachment being positively

associated with the benefits to psychological health including optimism. These authors

concluded that a strong role of the perceived relationship with God determines the effects of

prayer. Avoidant attachment styles have been negatively correlated with post-traumatic growth

(Zeligman et al., 2020). In addition to having been studied for its impact on relationship with

God, prayer has also been investigated for its effects on relationships with others. Fincham et al.

(2008) found that praying for one's partner predicted increased relationship satisfaction and that this aspect was mediated by commitment.

**Prayer Efficacy**

One of the most widely studied aspects of prayer has been its efficacy in bringing about the desired outcome of the prayer content itself, largely in areas such as ameliorating health conditions. In one study looking at mental health, Ahmadi et al. (2019) found that a written prayer practice reduced anxiety in mothers of children with cancer. Monroe and Jankowski (2016) found support for the efficacy of receptive prayer in improving perceived closeness to God and that this closeness was associated with increased positive affect and reduced psychological distress at post-test. Hai et al. (2021) found positive effects of prayer for substance using participants in a residential setting on daily spiritual experiences, reliance on God, and private religious practice. Among people recovering from addiction in AA, prayer was found to be associated with a significant reduction in cravings (Galanter et al., 2017).

## Meditation and Recovery

Meditation is one of the two activities upon which step 11 is based and one that has been extensively examined in scientific literature. The history of meditative practices in the literature spans several decades, however it gained a serious footing in the official discourse in the 1990s (Dryden & Still, 2006) based largely on the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. Apparently, Jon Kabat-Zinn was a Zen student who extracted mindfulness from Zen practice and used it to develop an 8-week stress reduction program based, the efficacy of which sparked a much wider interest and application of mindfulness practice in various populations with various conditions (Johnson, 2019). Christian meditative practices are a more recent addition to the research landscape, with a number of Christian-specific applications having been published in recent years (Ferguson et al.,

2010; Fox et al., 2016; Knabb, 2012). The exact mechanisms of positive change underlying meditation involve specific brain changes including lowered cortical arousal related to decreased pain sensitivity (Day et al., 2021), increased attentional control, increased body awareness and self-compassion, reduced psychological distress, and reduced maladaptive cognitive process such as rumination and thought suppression (Roca et al., 2021).

**Mindfulness Meditation**

Mindfulness meditation has been studied as an intervention for a wide range of conditions including addiction, pain, among others. One such newer application of this now longstanding technique has been a group-based mindfulness intervention, which Lan et al. (2018) demonstrated to significantly reduce smartphone addiction. Gu et al. (2018) reviewed ten studies and concluded that mindfulness interventions significantly reduced headache pain intensity. In a systematic review of transcendent states across meditative and contemplative traditions, Wahbeh et al. (2018) found that transcendent states were associated with slowed breathing, respiratory suspension, and reduced muscle activity as well as reported feelings of relaxed wakefulness. Relaxation might be one key component that helps explain the reduced effort that Andreu et al. (2018) found for smokers in inhibiting their smoking behavior after a brief mindfulness practice. Similarly, meditation has been found to increase self-control and reduce smart-phone addiction amongst adolescents (Choi et al., 2020).

**Zen Meditation**

Zen meditation, from which modern mindfulness practices were derived (Johnson, 2019), has been studied as well and found to have benefits in physiological and emotional functioning. Autonomic nervous system function measured in heart rate variability and respiratory sinus arrythmia were significantly improved during a brief, 10-minute intervention on drug addicted

participants (Lo et al., 2019). Sakakibara (2022) reviewed findings from his own laboratory confirming these physiological effects and suggested the slowed-breathing component might explain much of the positive effects. Zen practice has also been demonstrated to neutralize emotional evaluation of low and high arousal words (Lusnig et al., 2020).

**Jewish Meditation**

Despite the disproportionate focus on eastern meditative practices, which have evolved into secular clinical applications, both Jewish and Christian spiritual traditions include meditative and mystical practices. The most notable source of meditative influence in the Jewish faith is Kabballah, which is a system of philosophy and study from which various meditative practices have emerged which emphasize spiritual realization such as those which use meditation on biblical verses (Hilert & Gutierrez, 2020). Like other mystical traditions, Kabballah's goal is a human transformation, which in this tradition is associated with a radiance of light. This light is said to result from an encounter with God and also includes the necessity of being veiled, as is depicted in the biblical encounter between Moses and God (Lancaster, 2018).

**Christian Meditation**

The practice of meditation in the Christian tradition has a long, albeit lesser known, history dating back to the earliest members of the faith. The concept of meditation as it has been understood by Christian practitioners varied across Christian groups and over different time periods (Foster, 1998). A more recognizable term in the Christian tradition is contemplative prayer, which despite being labeled as a form of prayer, has much in common experientially with more well-known meditation practices such as focusing on the present moment (Knabb & Vazquez, 2018). In addition to these technical differences in the way the practice is described, Knabb (2021) distinguished between Christian-derived meditation practices versus Christian

accommodative ones, with the former being rooted in the existing Christian tradition and the latter being alterations of other practices which add Christian elements post hoc. Tan (2011) posited that similar to the nature of mindfulness-based traditions, Christianity had a long history of recognizing the sacrament of the present moment and the abandonment of self in the present moment to divine providence. This inclusion of the divine as experienced in the present moment, is the fundamental distinction between the Christian meditative tradition and Eastern and mindfulness, which results in significant differences in the nature of prayer and meditation as experienced in step 11.

Knabb (2021) organized the history of Christian meditation practices into eight categories of meditative practices including desert, orthodox, Jesuit, medieval, Celtic, French, protestant, and contemporary. These practices range from recitation of scripture to focus the mind and counter negative thinking to cultivating a sense of God's presence, surrender of self to God, and focusing on God's attributes. The practices have laid a foundation for a growing contemporary interest in Christian meditation. Knabb (2021) is one such contemporary researcher who defined Christian meditation as,

> A broad collection of concentrative and insight-oriented psychological and spiritual practices throughout historic Christianity, ranging from apophatic (emphasizing few to no words and no images) and kataphatic (emphasizing words and/or images), for shifting from earthly- to heavenly mindedness and developing a deeper communion with God and enduring contentment in Him in the midst of suffering. (p.9)

Knabb's (2021) approach to contemporary Christian meditation involves a four-step process consisting of 1) Noticing negative interior states, 2) Shifting from earthly-mindedness to heavenly-mindedness by focusing on God, 3) Acceptance of God's active, loving present from

moment to moment, and 4) Acting in life based on a deeper friendship with God and the contentment that arises from it. This process blends aspects familiar to mindfulness practice such as noticing with a deliberate shifting of consciousness towards God's presence and culminating with a resultant change in behavior.

**Conscious Contact with God**

CCWG as a phenomenon itself does not appear to exist in the literature, owing likely to its apparent inaccessibility to empirical inquiry in some respects due to the imprecision of the term 'contact' and the inability to adequately define God. What has been reviewed above is the predominantly quantitative exploration of relationships between the two practices, prayer and meditation, aimed at the TSPs and CTSPs to facilitate the experience of this CCWG with other measurable variables such as reduced psychological distress, improved attention, and the like. The experience of this divine contact itself as a distinct phenomenon seems missing from the current literature. Historically, there have been several religious and mystical accounts of encountering God or divinity by means of altered states of consciousness (Dionysious, 2011). The prominent psychologist William James examined the topics of religious conversion and mysticism among others, with the former corresponding to step 12's awakening experience and the latter with step 11 and the present topic of conscious contact. James (1997) identified four hallmarks of mystical experiences including: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. He gleaned these hallmarks from first-hand accounts of mystical encounters with the divine with a variety of individuals of various religious traditions including Christianity. The present study builds on the manner of James' work using modern phenomenological methods.

James (1997) described ineffability as a quality of the mystical encounter of God, which defies expression and necessitates the subjective experience in order to fully comprehend. This

reinforces the difficulty of exploring this empirically and illustrates the needs for phenomenological means to allow for the subjective personal accounts of participants to come forward, albeit as challenging as it still may be to articulate given this ineffable quality. The noetic quality is the characteristic described by experiencers of the state as one of knowledge, illumination, and revelation such that seems to convey deep truths and insights expressed with a curious sense of certainty. Transiency reflects the observation that mystical states were often reported to be sustainable for long, perhaps averaging 30 minutes to two hours at most. Passivity refers to the participants experience that a higher power (God) could have overtaken their will, even though the experiencer might have pursued the contact through various voluntary means such as prayer and meditation. The ineffability described here presents a challenge for this type of study, but it also seems to provide a foundation for the need for such research to capture the subjective experience. This seems to be the only means of bringing light to the nature of these experiences. Doing so in the present study might enrich our understanding of how Christians experience connection with God in CTSPs, inform our work with Christians in recovery, and potentially add support to the value of promoting CTSPs more widely. The work of James (1997) aids the present study in terms of providing a basis of comparison of participants' responses to those in this previous work and on the basis of their alignment with the four qualities described above.

**Spiritual Awakening**

Spiritual awakening is a conceptually challenging term with respect to empirical investigation and understanding since it is characterized by several definitions. The AA literature suggests that there might be as many definitions for these experiences as there are people who

have had them, though this description is also offered. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (1981, p. 106-107) stated,

> When a man or woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone.  He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being. ().

The anecdotal experiences from which the AA definition was based has been corroborated empirically in that awakening experiences were demonstrated to lead to profound religious, philosophical, relationship, and life-path changes (Taylor & Egeto-Szabo, 2017). This TS-based description of spiritual awakenings is also consistent with other descriptions documented in the literature as well, including those characterized as mystical experiences involving a purported contact with God. They were documented as they occurred spontaneously, as a result of spiritual practices as well from psychedelic substances. Spontaneous spiritual awakenings (SSA) have much in common phenomenologically with other types of altered states of consciousness including those associated with ingestion of psychedelic substances (Cornielle & Luke, 2021). Griffiths et al. (2006) also found that psilocybin-induced mystical experiences closely mirror experiences, which occur spontaneously, adding that they were marked by a strong sense of personal meaning and positive changes in attitude. Psilocybin has a long but disjointed history of study demonstrating its efficacy with a variety of conditions including addiction, though interestingly the results seem linked to mystical experiences resulting from the medication rather than the medication alone (Johnson & Griffiths, 2017). Interestingly, Bill W., the founder of AA speculated on the benefits of psilocybin in alcohol recovery after having medically supervised psychedelic administrations of his own (Lattin, 2012) even though he was

most known for championing the spiritual practice-based approach to spiritual awakening presented in the TS (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981).

Taylor and Egeto-Szabo (2017) identified spiritual practices among three other triggers for spiritual awakening including contact with nature, psychological turmoil, and engagement with spiritual literature. Their results also found these experiences varied from a few minutes to a few hours and the post-experience state was characterized by positive emotional states, intensified perception, love and compassion, a sense of unity, revelation, and inner quietness. The different spiritual practices such as meditation or contemplative prayer appear to be less important than the amount of practice in terms of predicting mystical experiences and increases in mindfulness (de Castro, 2015). This seems supported by a 2002 poll which estimated 80 million Americans reported awakening and other religious experiences, 25% of whom reported no specific religious preference (Gallup, 2003). Awakening experiences do not lead universally to positive outcomes. Particularly distressing experiences, termed spiritual emergencies, could occur after an awakening, and are often marked by feelings of overwhelm, confusion, perceptual disturbances, and difficulties resulting from having one's belief systems suddenly removed (Grof & Grof, 2017). The phenomenology of spiritual emergencies overlaps with psychotic clinical presentations, which led to questioning of the veracity of psychotic diagnoses in some circumstances given that several individuals with this presentation might be experiencing spiritual symptomology (Russell et al., 2009).

### Summary

The evidence for the positive benefits of TSPs and the constituent elements of step 11 of prayer and meditation is significant and growing with time. TSPs efficacy in reducing substance use (Hai et al., 2019; Humphreys et al., 2020; Krentzman et al., 2013), increasing treatment

adherence (Bell et al., 2022), and facilitating spiritual experiences (Bluma, 2018; Krentzman et al., 2013) linked with positive psychological states (Rodriguez-Morales, 2020) is convincing evidence that use of these programs is warranted and worth expanding. However due to the dearth of literature on the topic, it is unknown whether CTSPs produce similar benefits for their participants or whether Christians in TSPs experience differences in their spiritual experiences and in their approach to spirituality that might inhibit their progress and thus support the further development and proliferation of CTSPs. This study is relevant to fill this gap in the literature in that it gives voice to Christians engaged in step 11 to highlight their unique perspectives and meaning making with regard to CCWG. In particular, the results could help inform researchers in terms of how meaning drawn from the experience interacts with meaning derived from biblical learning as well as any ways this might be encouraged or inhibited in TSPs versus CTSPs.

The evidence for prayer, a technical component of the TSP is also strongly established in that it has been linked with positive psychological states (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018; Monroe & Jankowski, 2016; Njus & Scharmer, 2020), reduced anxiety (Ahmadi et al., 2019), reduced substance cravings (Galanter et al., 2017), increased spiritual experiences (Hai et al., 2019), and relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2008). However, the literature leaves unclear the content of prayers used by participants as well as the religious differences exist that between praying individuals and how that might or might not influence outcomes. The extent to which the Christian experience of prayer is influenced by biblically derived meaning has also gone unexplored. Similarly, meditation has demonstrated strong positive results in terms of decreased pain sensitivity (Day et al., 2021), increased attentional control, increased body awareness and self-compassion, reduced psychological distress, and reduced maladaptive cognitive process such as rumination and thought suppression (Roca et al., 2021).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

This section provides an initial overview in a number of areas including: the dissertation design and its rationale, research questions, participant criteria and recruitment strategies, interview procedures, sample interview questions, methods for interpreting data, the role of investigator bias, and methods for demonstrating quality. Consistent with the phenomenological methods proposed by Moustakas (1994), the present topic is rooted in autobiographical meanings and values of the participants in terms of their experiences with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening.

### Design

The design for this study is qualitative and uses interpretive phenomenology as the framework. This approach was most appropriate due to its emphasis on capturing the lived experiences of participants in terms of their subjective thoughts, feelings, and perceptions as they related to the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As this author points out, interpretive phenomenology also involves the researcher's interpretations. The interpretive phenomenology was employed in this design to gather an understanding of the unique experiences of Christians who participate in TSPs and CTSPs, specifically with regard to their use of prayer and meditation practices prescribed by step 11 of the TSP and CTSP as well as spiritual awakening as described in step 12 (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.). The central points of interest in this inquiry were the phenomena referred to in step 11as 'CCWG'(Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.) in terms of how participants experienced this phenomenon and the ways they perceived prayer and meditation to facilitate improvements or changes in the experience of the phenomenon. Secondarily, the study assessed

participants' experiences with spiritual awakening as outlined in step 12 and how it related to their practice of prayer and meditation (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.; Life Recovery, n.d.).

Using phenomenology to investigate the study's research questions was also related to its focus on extracting the meaning participants derived from the phenomena being studied, rather than an emphasis on quantitative variables (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). As Cruz and Tantia (2017) opined, qualitative inquiry is more interested in who the participants are rather than how many there could be, and as such the results are not designed to be generalizable outside of the particular participants involved. In this study, it is the particularities of the Christian participants' experiences that were of interest in that they have had no identifiable representation in the literature as it pertains to this topic of the study.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

## Research Question 1

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experience of conscious contact with God?

## Research Question 2

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experiences of prayer and meditation and the relationship of these practices to conscious contact with God?

## *Research Question 3*

How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe spiritual awakening, as described in step twelve?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was central Pennsylvania, though the participants could come from any state in the United States as the procedures would be conducted primarily online and by telephone. The online platform was Microsoft Teams. The local site was an office in a local church, PA Bible Teaching Fellowship, which was selected for privacy and convenience reasons. Permission from the Church administration was granted for use of the facilities (Appendix E). Efforts were made for in-person participants to ensure their comfort including furniture that were conducive to an extended conversation.

**Participants**

The participants of this study were seven Christians participating in a TSP or CTSP. The study used purposive sampling in which participants were gathered using criterion sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria included having particular elements of a confession of Christian faith as well as having had experience specifically with steps eleven and twelve of a TSP or CTSP for at least six months. The specific criterion for inclusion as a Christian participant was aligned with the Apostles' Creed, given its broad acceptance among Protestant and non-denominational Christian churches. Participants had to be aged 18 or older, able to communicate in English, and willing to have their interviews and other data recorded and transcribed for purposes of the study's analysis. In addition, participants sought had to have a passion and interest in advancing knowledge of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Recruitment involved advertising to Life Recovery, a CTSP, through their national headquarters to contact their network of Life Recovery groups to invite participation from eligible participants. Permission to recruit from this organization had been obtained (Appendix D). Communicating with the groups included a study flyer with pertinent information about the

study, inclusion criteria, and a link to an online form to apply. Follow up phone calls were conducted from the applications to screen and select candidates for participation to ensure appropriateness for the study including the ability to complete all required elements including a review and written acknowledgement of informed consent. At the end of the call the interview was scheduled either virtually or in-person. Participants were compensated with a $10 gift card to Amazon.com, paid upon completion of the study including completion of the interview.

## Procedures

Upon approval of the dissertation proposal, the researcher applied for and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The study was then be carried out using a semi-structured interview completed by participants in a session of 45-90 minutes. Prior to meeting for interviews, participants were given informed consent, reviewed with the researcher and provided their signatures acknowledging their understanding of what was covered. Elements of consent included the optional nature of participation as well as their right to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Participant privacy was also reviewed including that their names and other personal identifying information would not be included in any published results and that using pseudonyms would be used to protect their personal privacy. Interviews were conducted via the secure platform doxy.me and audio recorded.

As suggested by Moustakas (1994), participants were encouraged to think of themselves as co-researchers in that they would actually be contributing to the discovery of new knowledge related to these phenomena. The aim was to promote a collaborative space with a heightened appreciation of the value and purpose of the study while engaging, "the total self of the research participant" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). The essential definitions of key terms such as conscious

contact with God and spiritual awakening were provided and discussed for clarity in an effort to promote clarity and avoid confusion.

**The Researcher's Role**

My experiences with conscious contact with God (CCWG) and spiritual awakening (SA) have been chief among the most profound experiences of my life. CCWG experiences have been many and have evolved in terms of the quality of the experience as well as the meaning derived from them. CCWG began after long periods of meditation, which evolved into experiences of a much more frequent, even daily type, that occurred in prayer and communion-type encounters. My SA experiences included both spontaneous awakening experiences as referenced above in the work of Cornielle and Luke (2021) and experiences brought about through the practices of prayer and meditation. These included powerfully transformative episodes marked by all of James' (1997) hallmarks of mystical experiences including ineffability, noetic sense, transiency, and passivity.

**Data Collection**

The primary means of data collection in phenomenological inquiry is the long interview, which entails informal and interactive collection of information about the topic in an open-minded and semi-structured manner (Moustakas, 1994). The interview process is open-ended and not necessarily reliant on structured questions, which are only used to the extent needed to facilitate a full telling of the participant's story. Prior to the interview, the interviewer should engage in epoche to set aside preconceived notions, definitions, and ideas that may color the data collected (Moustakas, 1994). These interviews then were semi-structured and lasted between 45-90 minutes in duration, varying based on how much participants had to share in their responses.

**Interview**s

The interview process began with social conversation to promote a relaxed environment most conducive to openness and honesty from the participants, a climate that is the responsibility of the researcher to promote (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection portion of the interview included semi-structured interviews lasting from 45-90 minutes in duration. The rationale for this style of interview was that it combined using 15-17 predetermined questions with the opportunity for prompting the participant to expound on their responses when appropriate. The interviewer in the semi-structured interview, used probing questions in response to specific responses from participants that might have veered from the original planned questions. This move gave the interviewer flexibility, allowing the participants' lived experiences to emerge in natural ways that might more fully and meaningfully capture the experience than would be possible with a rigid adherence to predetermined closed questions. This reflects the reality that participant experiences were quite unique and any particular participant's responses were best captured using only a few questions. However, some involved probing based on what was shared.

The rationale for the time allotment of the interviews was to have a 45-minute base time, which was reasonable enough for the participants to easily accommodate this into their schedules. Leaving the additional 30 minutes as an optional extension provided some flexibility in the event that some participants' responses were more involving or the participants wanted to take more time to fully articulate their responses. This aspect appealed to participants who needed a tighter time restriction for their schedule as well as those who needed additional time to elaborate their particular responses more fully.

**Interview Questions**

1. How long have you participated in Twelve Step Program(s)?

2. How long have you been a Christian?

3. How long have you been praying? Meditating?

4. How has your experience of prayer/meditation changed as a result of participating in Twelve Step Programs?

5. Describe your experience of conscious contact with God.

6. Describe your experience of spiritual awakening.

7. Describe your experience of prayer in the 11th step.

8. Describe your experience of meditation in the 11th step.

9. How does prayer contribute to conscious contact with God. To spiritual awakening?

10. How does meditation contribute to conscious contact with God. To spiritual awakening?

The first two questions were designed to provide some basic background information about each participant in terms of the length of their participation in TSPs and in the Christian faith. This is a helpful starting place in terms of understanding the context in which their experiences with these phenomena have evolved. The length of time with the Christian faith also helps understand and shape how long they have practiced prayer and how familiar they may be with the biblical bases of the TSPs. Questions five through nine are consistent with how Moustakas (1994) suggests gathering phenomenological data in terms of targeting the direct descriptions from participants of their experiences with these phenomena. The remaining questions were intended to elicit connections from the participants in terms of how the phenomena interact and how the practices of prayer and meditation interact with the phenomena, which is targeted an enhanced understanding of the meaning.

Moustakas (1994) pointed out that there were times when participants' responses might not provide the rich, substantive stories needed and proposed that additional questions could help (p. 116). Therefore, the following probing questions were used.

1. What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?

2. How did the experience affect you?  What changes do you associate with the experience?

3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?

4. What feelings were generated by the experience?

5. What thoughts stood out for you?

6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

7. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis began with transcription of the interviews followed by horizontalization, which involved treating every statement relevant to the topic as having equal value after which meaning or meaning units could be listed and then organized into themes and repetitive statements removed (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis continued in a way suggested by Creswell and Poth's (2018) simplified version approach originally put forth by Moustakas (1994; as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018). Participants' experiences were broken down into three categories including textural, structural, and composite descriptions. Textural descriptions captured "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and included verbatim examples. The structural descriptions reflected on "how" the experience happened including elements such as setting and context.  In the case of this study, this aspect included praying and meditating alone versus in groups such as in the TSP.  The composite description aimed at

capturing the essence of the participants' experience and represented the culmination of the descriptions presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Consistent with the approach of Moustakas (1994), the researcher's own experience was also bracketed out to prevent any bias from own previous personal experience  that could impact the analysis of participants' experiences. The participants' interviews were transcribed and broken down into key statements and organized into themes and labeled categorically. Participants' descriptions were used in textural form to interpret their primary data characteristics, followed by the subsequent procedures of horizontalization, essence, bracketing, and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of the data analysis was evaluated using criteria from van Manen (2014) as suggested by Creswell & Poth (2018).  It involved the analysis of heuristic reasoning, interpretive depth, and distinctive rigor. Heuristic reasoning involves evaluating the text in terms of how well it induces a sense of contemplative wonder and questioning attentiveness and aids in ensuring the experience of the phenomenon is captured as opposed to a more empirical description. Interpretive depth involves evaluating the extent to which the text supplies a description that goes beyond the taken-for-granted understanding.  Distinctive rigor evaluates the extent to which the text is directed by a self-critical question of distinct meaning of the phenomenon, useful to distinguish the phenomenon from other types of experiences (van Manen, 2014). Investigator bias was controlled for to the extent possible through bracketing wherein the researcher described his own experience with the phenomenon.

**Credibility**

Credibility should be established to the degree that a study accurately represents reality and is substantiated by having participants verify the accuracy of their statements (Cope, 2014). This suggestion was accomplished by having participants review the transcript of their interview for accuracy as well as of the composite description to identify how well it reflected their experience (Moustakas, 1994). Credibility was also strengthened in this study by keeping good records of the research process including all field notes and a timeline of activities throughout the research, which constitutes an audit trail (Carcary, 2020).

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability, also known as consistency, was established by comparison among participants' responses to determine the extent to which the experiences reported were similar (Janis, 2022). It was also supported by the extent to which the researcher's procedures, methods, and interpretations of results could be replicated by future researchers (Moustakas, 1994).

**Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research is the equivalent of generalizability in quantitative studies and refers to the extent to which the results may be applicable in other settings (Slevin & Sines, 2000). Accordingly, Slevin and Sines (2000) recommended using a multisite approach to enhance the transferability dimension of qualitative work. This study has an element of that in the sense that multiple types of TSPs were studied across different groups, some of which might not be located in the same state.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study included the need to protect the privacy of the participants' information, which was accomplished by storing paper records in a locked file

cabinet and electronic records on a password protected laptop accessible only by the researcher. The data will be stored for three years after which electronic data will be deleted and copies will be shredded.  Participants' names were also changed to pseudonyms in the published results to further protect their privacy. Participants were informed about the reason for the study and be made aware that they had the right to withdraw from participation at any time.

## Summary

The methods of this study are organized around an interpretive phenomenological design used to address the three primary research questions related to the experiences of Christian TSP and CTSP participants with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening. The study followed a structured procedure carried out via online interviews in central Pennsylvania after a detailed informed consent process. Data collection was done in a manner consistent with previous research. Ethical considerations were made including the protection of participant data.

# CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

## Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Christians participating in TSP and CTSPs with CCWG through prayer and meditation and spiritual awakening. This chapter describes the findings of the study beginning with data and descriptions of the participant sample, followed by a detailed reporting of themes developed from the interview responses. The chapter concludes with specific responses to research questions supported by direct quotations from participants and a comprehensive chapter summary.

## Participants

A total of seven participants were included in the study. There were 10 total respondents to the recruitment advertising and one potential participant was excluded from participation due to not meeting the eligibility criteria described. The other two were excluded after failing to return consent forms or respond to communications. The remaining seven participants moved forward in the study and complete the informed consent form and interviews. All of the participants completed their interviews virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform online. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

### Alan

Alan is a 42-year-old white male from a lower income background who is divorced with one adult child and one child he is raising as a single parent. He receives social security disability for a mental health condition and supplements his income modestly by participating in a local band. He has a substantial history of heavy drug and alcohol use and dependence he associates with his participation in many music concerts over nearly two decades. He has maintained abstinence from substances for ten years owing, per his own report, less to TSP participation and

more to his involvement in his Christian faith. Alan attends a local church weekly and participates in small group fellowship weekly and other activities as well and credits the strength of his church's biblical teaching as a reason for his ability to continue to grow spiritually.

**Edward**

Edward is a 32-year-old white male from a middle-class background who recently began college and maintains part time work in the construction trade. He is unmarried with no children and resides with family while he attends school. Edward describes himself as a life-long Christian, though he acknowledges that his faith has changed a lot as a result of his struggle with addiction and his experiences with TSPs and CTSPs. He is an active weekly member of both types of programs and very involved in his church on a weekly basis as well. He has approximately 18 months of sobriety from substances and attributes much of his success to TSP involvement and particularly to the acceptance he feels in that setting as opposed to church where he feels reluctant to share about his addiction and recovery with many people.

**Amy**

Amy is a 51-year-old white female from a middle-class background who is unmarried with two children. She works for local government full time and describes and extensive history of psychological trauma and involvement with alcohol abuse associated with that. Despite involvement with the church since childhood, she reported that her "born-again" experience occurred four years ago and marked the true beginning of a personal relationship with God. She had prior experience with TSPs and presently more with CTSPs. Amy is an active member of her church and serves others in many ways including holding blanket and clothing drives, cooking, and serving food, and serving in children's ministry.

**Jason**

Jason is a 51-year-old white male who is married with two children and works in education as well as operating a part-time small business. The most significant part of his struggle with alcohol occurred later in life and led to being charged with a DUI a little more than one year ago. He has maintained sobriety for just over one year and maintains weekly attendance at both a TSP and CTSP program. Jason credits these programs with opening up his understanding of how his faith cannot be separate from his recovery because of the centrality of the personal relationship with God in pursuing healing.

**Chris**

Chris is a 26-year-old white male from a middle class background who is unmarried with no children and residing with family. He maintains full time employment and has maintained an active church life as well as frequent participation in TSPs as well as engaging in service opportunities outside of the regular meetings. Chris describes a long history of serious substance abuse and dependence, multiple residential treatment stays, and approximately 18 months of sobriety. He describes himself as a life-long Christian who walked away from God during his teen years. Since beginning recovery, he reported a vastly improving relationship with God that is supported by more time in prayer, fellowship with other believers, and particularly service to others who are also struggling with addiction.

**George**

George is a 49-year-old white male from a middle-class background who is married with two children. He works full time in the technology industry and describes an active involvement in TSPs for nearly two decades including 15 years of sobriety from alcohol. George describes a significant history of alcohol abuse and dependence and related relational turmoil. He reported

that he has been a Christian since childhood but that he only really began to understand personal spirituality as a result of participating in TSPs. He spends much of his time engaged in service to others struggling with alcoholism by serving as a sponsor in AA and finding many other ways to serve and give back.

**Bob**

Bob is a 44-year-old white male from a middle-class background who is married with one child and works full time in the healthcare industry. He describes a significant history of addiction including chemical and process addictions, but primarily to alcohol. Bobbegan participating in TSP a little over 10 years ago and was later exposed to CTSPs where he primarily is focused on attending presently. He is very active in his church in many ways including small groups, children's ministry, and weekly attendance. He attributes his recovery to his personal relationship with God and is active in serving others who struggle with addiction on a regular basis.

There were six males and one female included in the study ranging in age from 26 to 51. Six participants participated previously in AA and three had specific experience with the CTSP Life Recovery. Most participants were presently attending a TSP or CTSP, endorsed having experiences with CCWG and spiritual awakening, and engaging in prayer and meditation. All participants also affirmed the Apostles' Creed as the final criterion for eligibility.

Table 1 provides a description of each participant on a number of demographic variables.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant Name (Pseudonym) | Gender | Age | Time in TSP/CTSP | Type of Twelve Step |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alan | Male | 42 | 10 years | AA |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Edward | Male | 32 | 1.5 years | Life Recovery, Sex-Addicts Anonymous |
| Amy | Female | 51 | 4 years | AA, NA |
| Jason | Male | 51 | 1 year | AA, Life Recovery |
| Chris | Male | 26 | 1.5 years | AA |
| George | Male | 49 | 15 years | AA |
| Bob | Male | 44 | 10 years | AA, Life Recovery |

## Results

Participant interviews were transcribed electronically using the Microsoft Teams software platform and edited for formatting, which included correcting typographical errors. Within 72 hours of the interview, participants were emailed their edited transcript and invited to verify the accuracy of their interview. They were asked to respond within two days to inform the researcher of any inaccuracies. After all participant transcripts were verified and collected, each transcript was reviewed to identify every statement relevant to the topic, treating each as having equal value, in the process of horizontalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meaning units were then highlighted, compiled into a written list, and then organized into themes after removing repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994). Table 2 provides examples of how meaning units were converted into themes.

**Table 2**

*Examples of Themes Derived from Meaning Units*

| Meaning Units | Theme |
|---|---|
| "So I think prayer, I think it starts with prayer. I think it starts finding your connection with God and starting a relationship with him." | Relationship with and Presence of God |
| "People can see the glow in your face and they can. They can feel the presence of God and you're and you're a light." | |

| | |
|---|---|
| "It's just like it's it just snapped. Everything became clear." | |
| "…there's still times where it's like you need something from God. Very personal and very important in the moment. Whether it's an understanding or some kind of answer." | Clarity, Understanding, and Direction |
| "…but also receiving and hearing what he wills for us in our lives and what direction he wants us to go…" | |
| "Through time, it started to happen where it was like, wow, I'm not even thinking about a drink or a drug, and I can walk as a free man where I can go to a restaurant and there's a bar. You know, I'm sitting down at the tables, but there's a bar to my right or to my left. And I'm not thinking about it, you know, so that was my ultimate spiritual awakening for me" | Transformation |
| "I quit drinking. I quit doing drugs. I quit. You know, all the fornication, all that stuff. | |

**Relationship with and Presence of God**

This theme emerged in a number of participant interviews first in their descriptions of

prayer as speaking to and conversing with God. Alan described an increasing relational closeness

to God when he said, "It's [prayer and meditation] definitely got me closer to God and the

contact with him is, yeah, I could feel it. I could feel that he's there and I understand that he's

there and I know that he's there." He illustrated the reciprocity in the relationship when he

stated, "And I think that loving Jesus and loving God brings that love back to you…" In

describing prayer, Edward shared,

> … the importance of it and value of it, I think it always remains the same where it's like
>
> as part of being a Christian, you should feel like God is approachable. You should feel

like to a certain degree, you know him and he knows you. And there's like a familiarity there.

These statements reflect a sense of knowing and give and take within the context of the relational experience with God. Chris made a distinction between prayer and meditation when he stated, "prayer is more of the asking…and then for me meditation is the listening." A warmth in the relationship is evidenced in Edward's reflection that, "It's not so much tied to my actions as it is just like in indisputable truth like God is there and he's not critiquing my walk with him. You know, it's just there is acceptance and love." Amy described what she receives from the relationship as follows, "…just the word peace comes to mind because no matter what it is that I bring to him, I always leave feeling peaceful. I always leave feeling better than I did going in."

The second aspect of this theme is the very felt sense of God's presence described in various emotional and relational ways including when Chris stated, "People can see the glow in your face, and they can feel the presence of God and you're a light. You know you're a light to be around and people ask questions, and they wonder, you know." In describing his experience of spiritual awakening, Alan pointed out to this presence when he characterized that phenomenon as a "high state of feeling blessed, of feeling like close to God, where it's like, it's concentrated, like you get an answer to something, and you feel heard and seen by God in a special and specific way." He goes on to name several other feelings including, "...peace, comfort, encouragement…acceptance, validation, and love." There were many emotional experiences across participants variously described as elements of CCWG and spiritual awakening and emerging from both prayer and meditation. Jason highlighted presence in his response to CCWG,

I felt it in tangibly in a few different ways. It's often a kind of a sweetness and a peace, like a feeling of peace. Like a, almost like a warm breeze or a cold breeze when you're hot. I'm just kind of feeling that it's gonna be OK and the reassurance that I don't need to worry.

This added element of removal of anxiety was echoed by Amy and Bob as well.

**Clarity, Understanding, and Direction**

The three elements of this theme were described in numerous ways by participants and work together to form a cohesive theme in that the clarity and understanding received in the experiences of the phenomena were related to a sense of direction for participants. Alan referenced both clarity and understanding in his characterizations of CCWG including,

So I think maybe the contact with God is understanding his word and to understand it full force, It's just like it's it just snapped. Everything became clear, [and] I can describe it as like a pure, like, uh, clarity.

Edward added to this theme in his ideas about spiritual awakening, stating that,

You know, there's just some sort of idea that gets conveyed to you in a way where it brings clarity" and Amy said, "And not always praying to him, but also receiving and hearing what he wills for us in our lives and what direction he wants us to go and what is our real reality.

To the participants, this directionality seemed to emerge in moments of clarity and internal quiet. The direction from God was characterized by George in his description of prayer as occurring through relationship to circumstances and others, " He teaches me a lesson through everything and everyone" and also that he receives moral guidance through, "attunement in prayer."

**Transformation**

Participants universally spoke about various kinds of change that occurred as a result of pursuing CCWG and experiencing spiritual awakening. Dan shared that spiritual awakening, "changed my entire outlook about what is real, what I value, and what I should put the focus of my life on." Other participants noted changes that were more specific to personal behavior. For example, Chris reported,

> … if I take a step back and take a hard look at what I've been doing, there's a reason why change isn't happening. So, you know, removing myself from the kids I was growing up with and partying with and drugging with and completely relocating.

Jason's changes were more specific to the practices of prayer and meditation in terms of increasing their frequency, which is evidenced in his statement, "And as I've gotten older, I think I've tried to do it more."

Other types of transformation that were more transient including the alleviation of physical pain, evidenced in Amy's statement referring to prayer and CCWG,

> Just maybe the lack of sensation really. I kind of don't notice my body. If I'm, you know, just in the normal prayer time, I can kind of disconnect and I get relief from pain that way, that sort of thing.

Jason pointed out to the change in state of mind in terms of experiencing a state of blessing that he doesn't want to leave. He said, "it just makes me want to stay there and not have to do anything else other than just kind of experience kind of that sweetness and presence again. And it makes me want to experience it more often." Referring to a more lasting sense of change, George shared,

The essence of a spiritual experience and a spiritual awakening is being changed. With

that spiritual awakening, it's a transformative kind of thing. From my prayer life not

being the foxhole prayer anymore-- God, get me out of this scrape and I'll swear I'll do

anything. You know, it [prayer] became more an expression of gratitude.

Bob added that meditation and moments of spiritual awakening converge in, "a cleansing sort of

change in which what is impure within me is removed and the desire for love, mercy, and the

goodness of God replaces it." These types of transformations are reflected biblically in verses

that assure believers that they receive a new heart and a new nature (Ezek 36:26; Heb 8:10.

The analysis concluded in a way suggested by Creswell and Poth's (2018) simplified

version of an approach originally put forth by Moustakas (1994; as cited in Creswell & Poth,

2018). Consistent with this approach, participants' experiences were broken down into three

categories including textural, structural, and composite descriptions. Textural descriptions

capture "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and may include verbatim

examples whereas structural descriptions reflect "how" the experience happened including

elements such as setting and context. The composite description aimed at capturing the essence

of the participants' experience and represents the culmination of the descriptions presented

(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Bracketing

Bracketing is a topic without a universally accepted definition, owing in part to how it

evolved over time away from the original intents of Husserl, the philosopher whose ideas formed

the basis for phenomenological research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). These researchers describe

numerous definitions of various ways in which bracketing seeks to set aside and preclude the

researcher's experiences for the purpose of avoiding bias in the research. I am not convinced that

such setting aside is entirely possible, however, the value of having my experiences documented separately might contribute to enhancing the rigor of the data analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

My experience with conscious contact with God (CCWG), spiritual awakening, prayer, and meditation are longstanding and include a rich variety and evolving characteristics over time. The activity of the Holy Spirit, as taught in the Bible has been the foundation of my experience with CCWG including God's presence in prayer, reading and understanding the Bible, and experiencing the fruits of the spirit including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). I am conscious of these fruits and God's overall presence much of the time, particularly during periods of prayer and study of the Bible. My prayer activity consists of direct verbal communication with God as well as communing through stillness and contemplative prayer. My experiences with spiritual awakening have included a number of profound personal encounters of sudden insight, expanded awareness of God's love, and profound sense of meaning.

## Research Question Responses

This section answers each of the research questions using the themes that emerged through data analysis and selected quotations from participants.

### Research Question 1

***How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experience of conscious contact with God?***

Participants described their conscious contact with God (CCWG) in various ways reflected in two of the emergent themes including relationship, presence, and guidance for the decisions of life. The most notable was the experience of CCWG as a manifestation of a

relationship with God experienced through prayer, meditation, and the reading of Scriptures. This was reflected in the reciprocal communication described in talking to and hearing from God in a variety of ways in the practices of prayer and meditation. For some participants, CCWG involved an orientation towards God and particular intentionality in seeking him at particular times of day, as evidenced in Jason's response, "…it's waking up and seeking him in the morning, you know, being intentional about starting the day ending the day being thankful to him and throughout the day." The idea of making time for God at scheduled times and seeking to extend to more times throughout the day emerged in several interviews and seemed to reflect participants' understanding that this relationship would improve to the extent they were able to add time in CCWG to their lives. The time spent in CCWG was also relevant to the ability to receive direction and understand God's will for their lives, which is the stated aim of the latter portion of step eleven of the TSPs (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981).

The aspects of God's presence that were realized in relation to him were characterized in very palpable, tangible, and felt ways that were meaningful to participants. This presence was characterized as "light" and "glowing" by Amy and Bob and was said to be experienced during times of prayer and characterized by Bob as intensifying when praying with others. These experiences were described as "blessed" by Edward, Jason, and Alan and as "sweet" or "sweetness" multiple times by Jason. Prayer and meditation were understood by some participants including Alan, Amy, and Bob as the CCWG itself rather than merely being practices designed to improve CCWG as described in step 11 of the TSPs (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). The presence was universally described in positive terms, even when dealing with negative emotions or occurring in response to poor life decisions.

**Research Question 2**

> *How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step*
> *programs describe their experiences of prayer and meditation and the relationship of these*
> *practices to conscious contact with God?"*

Prayer emerged as the dominant of the two practices explored in this research question and the one that all participants were more comfortable and familiar with, particularly those who had been Christians for a long time. There was a universal sense of growth in terms of the quality of prayer experienced by participants over the course of their lives as Christians, reflecting the nature of relationships, which develop more intimacy with time and healthy attention. Most participants pointed out they had minimal or no experience with meditation prior to participation in TSPs, but had been praying most or all of the time they have been Christian. The data on prayer could be organized into the categories of purpose, practice, and meaning. Purpose emerged in the theme of relationship and presence in that participants seemed to be engaging in prayer for the purpose of experiencing God's presence for its own sake, but also for the practical purposes of asking for things like deliverance from difficulties or for clarity and direction. Expressing gratitude was another commonly offered purpose as well as asking for things on behalf of others in need, with both of these aspects reportedly growing over the course of participants' recovery and deepening relationship with God. This was most notably reflected by Chris when he stated,

> When I was just praying as a Christian, it was always me, me, me, you know, and praying
> for myself, my family. But then through time and learning … I started to slowly
> transition into praying for the people around me, you know, praying to you know, my
> higher power that I call God, that I could bless someone today, that I could be of love

today, you know. Help someone today and also praying for upcoming situations. Any

current situations, things like that where I'm praying more outside of myself.

Meditation was a practice less familiar to participants. Several of them were introduced to

meditation in the various printed materials available through their TSPs and personal instruction

of sponsors in those programs. Only three participants seemed to be aware of any particularly

Christian forms of meditative practice.  Meditation was experienced in relation to CCWG for

most participants in terms of a receptivity from God, in contrast to prayer which was

characterized more as expressions towards God. This was noted alternatively as "stillness" and

"listening" by Jason and Chris respectively. The presence aspect was a noted part of the

experience for majority of the respondents. Edward described it as "communing" that was

accompanied by peace that most participants associated with CCWG in that they felt the peace

was coming directly from God and as a result of their connection with and receptivity towards

him through the practice

**Research Question 3**

*How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step*

*programs describe spiritual awakening, as described in step twelve?*

Consistent with the observation of James (1997), there was an ineffable quality to

participants' descriptions of spiritual awakening. Most participants verbalized some difficulty

articulating these experiences and all seemed to have a hesitation and slowness to respond that

reflected a difficulty putting their experience into words. Submissions that emerged related to the

themes of presence and transformation in that participants described marked experiences of the

felt sense of God's presence during the awakening, which was followed by definitive and

enduring changes in their lives. The felt sense of presence within the awakening experiences was

described in various ways such as a "high state of feeling blessed, of feeling like close to God…you feel heard and seen by God in a special and specific way…" which was Edward's account whereas Amy shared, "…it's peace for me. That's what I take from it. The deep sense of everything will be OK." Peace was an aspect of the experience echoed by Jason, Alan, Edward, Chris, and Bob and several participants noted an aspect of the awakening experience in which they understood this to be directly from God without the ability to explain how they knew.

All the study participants agreed that spiritual awakening involved a transformation both in terms of their outward behavior as well as their internal disposition towards God and other people. In terms of behavior, participants noted the ability to refrain from drugs, alcohol, and other forms of undesired behavior such as the way they treat others. Bob shared, "I am kinder, gentler, and more patient, a better father and husband" and Alan shared in a way similar to that of the other participants when he said, "lifestyle changes. I quit drinking. I quit doing drugs. I quit, you know, all the fornication, all that stuff ." In addition to these outward behaviors, some participants often noted a shift in their interiority in terms of a reduction in self-oriented thinking and a marked increase in the attention to and thoughts about the care and well-being of others. George very well exemplified this when he said, "my motto has become to be useful, not important." He went on to refer to Jas 2:17 when he says, "faith without works is dead" and talks about the need to give to others that is reflected in the latter portion of step twelve and is said to result from having had the spiritual awakening (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981). The experiences described by participants with respect to spiritual awakening were unanimously positive and life changing, whether for shorter or longer periods of time. The experiences were also markedly distinct from any other types of experiences in ordinary life or in the practice of their Christian faith.

**Summary**

This chapter laid out the results of the study including a descriptive examination of the participants, identification and exploration of themes that emerged from data analysis, bracketing of this researcher's own experiences, and answers each of the research questions. The central themes emerging from the data were relationship with and presence of God; clarity, understanding, and direction; and transformation. There was widespread agreement in terms of the relationship with God experienced through these practices as well as the directional guidance for the particularities of participants' lives. Transformation, relationship, and presence were the most salient themes derived from the data and the remaining theme seemed to emerge as a consequence of these elements. The themes reflect an extraordinarily positive experience with the phenomena under investigation and affirm that the aim of improving CCWG through prayer and meditation expressed in step eleven (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981) was accomplished through these practices for the participants in the study.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of Christians in TSPs and CTSPs with the phenomena of CCWG as derived through prayer and meditation as well as their experiences with spiritual awakening. This study examined the individual lived experiences of people engaged in these programs who had experienced these phenomena as part of their engagement with steps eleven and twelve of the TSPs and CTSPs. This final chapter concludes this research and provides an interpretations and ideas regarding the findings. It covers a summary and interpretive discussion of findings, implications for various community stakeholders, delimitations and limitation, recommendations for future research, and an encapsulating summary.

### Summary of Findings

This section briefly responds to each of the research questions to ground the closing discussion in terms of the relevance and implications of the study and properly interpret the results.

RQ:1 How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experience of conscious contact with God?

According to the findings of this study with respect to the experience of Christians in TSPs and CTSPs of CCWG, this phenomenon involves placing of one's attention on God. This aspect is achieved through the practice of communication in both verbal and non-verbal ways with God, resulting in the experience of the presence of God in relationship with oneself. Prayer was the most salient means for participants of engaging in this communication and included various elements such as giving thanks, asking for guidance, healing, knowledge of God's will

and the power to carry it out as expressed in step 11 of TSPs (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981).

RQ2: How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe their experiences of prayer and meditation and the relationship of these practices to conscious contact with God?"

There was also a sense in the descriptions of prayer of using it as a form of acknowledgement of God's presence throughout the day, as if reminding oneself that God was near throughout the day and engaging in some communication as a point of contact before moving on to the next aspect of daily life.  Meditation was less familiar to the participants in the study though still universally practiced by all of them. There were a variety of understandings with respect to defining meditation. For many, meditation was a practice of stillness and receptivity or waiting on the presence of God without the use of a lot of words as is the case in prayer.  Knabb's (2020) work highlights this distinction between verbal and non-verbal means of practice, pointing out that kataphatic practice is with words and apophatic is without words.   For others there was an added element of using the text of the Bible as a point of focus. Various selected verses or passages would be read or spoken aloud repetitively to encourage deeper reflection and understanding.  This type of practice is akin to a longstanding historical practice amongst some groups of Christians called Lectio Divina (Knabb, 2020).  Participants in the study were predominantly informed about meditation through their participation in TSPs, however, some had sought knowledge through reading and other, more explicitly Christian, resources.

**RQ: 3** How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs and Christian Twelve Step programs describe spiritual awakening, as described in step twelve?

Spiritual awakening was found to be marked by significantly meaningful experiences of positive emotion and insight that were distinctly different for other states of consciousness and which resulted in substantive changes in the outward and inward lived experiences of participants. Prayer was described predominantly in terms of verbal communication with God in a variety of settings and expressions and was universally endorsed as being a requirement and in many cases a precursor to spiritual awakening. Meditation was similarly linked to spiritual awakening and described as the experience of the felt presence of God, and as a precipitant of spiritual awakening experiences. The meditation experiences were most often characterized in terms of receiving something from God, whereas prayer was offering something, typically verbal, directed towards God. It was this state of receptivity for some participants that would in some instances of spiritual awakening be the preceding condition for the spiritual awakening experience itself.  The phenomena were demonstrably meaningful to the involved participants in ways that profoundly impact their lives in terms of their Christian faith as well as their recovery from addiction.

## Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings of this study with respect to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Most of the concepts from both of these domains were demonstrated to have a high degree of applicability to the present findings. These include various areas of corroboration and divergence with previous research as well as areas in which the present study contributes to scholarly knowledge.

**Theoretical Corroboration and Divergence**

The theoretical bases for this study were existential therapy, transpersonal therapy, and biblical Christianity. Each of these were revealed by the findings to have pertinence in terms of authenticating or deviating from the central tenets of these approaches. The salience of meaning in a person's life, particularly with respect to behavior change is the foundational aspect of existential therapy (May, 1996). This idea was confirmed in the present findings in the sense that participants' experiences of the meaningfulness of these phenomena seemed to imbue their own sense of value in their lives, despite their also being a tangible benefit to the practices. The existential idea that personal identity was known in relation to others (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999) was supported in these findings in the sense that in relationship to God, participants reported a renewed and oft altogether transformed understanding of themselves. This realization overlaps with biblical Christianity in its proffering of the idea that human beings could only understand themselves in relation to God and that knowing him was the ultimate nature of eternal life (John 17:3). Existential therapy also involves the need to address the anxieties of life through enhancing meaning (May, 1996). This notion has correspondence with biblical Christianity, which invites Christians to give their anxieties to God because of the care God has for them (1 Pet 5:7). In the latter approach, meaning is derived specifically through the experience of the love of God, which was strongly supported in these findings by participants who reported feelings of love and acceptance coming from God. The relationship with God was also embedded in a broader sense of meaning derived by participants and evidenced in their characterizations of having been transformed by the relationship with God through the experiences of CCWG and spiritual awakening.

One area of transpersonal therapy that appears to be supported by this study is the ability to grow as a result of "peak" experiences (Wittine, 1989). The spiritual awakening experiences described in this study demonstrates peak experiences in that they involve intense states of positive emotion differing from ordinary experience. Likewise, the participants also reported strong growth demonstrated in the emergent theme of transformation.  Perhaps a comparable idea from biblical Christianity is the idea of being "born again" (John 3:3) or regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Some of the participants in this study described their born-again or conversion experiences as one of their spiritual awakenings. The resulting transformations from this process described by these Christians is supported by several scriptures that speak to the sense in which God draws near to those who draw near to Him (Jas 4:8), in this case through CCWG as well as in the verses speaking to the new nature of Christians post-conversion (Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 3:9).  One area of divergence in the present study from biblical Christianity entails the dearth of emphasis on meditation upon the word of God as a means of knowing Him (Matt 4:4; Matt 7:24 & 26; Ps 119:105).

**Empirical Corroboration and Divergence**

Though not an efficacy study, the results here corroborate outcome studies demonstrating the effectiveness of TSPs in addiction recovery (Humphreys et al., 2020). All of the participants in the present findings reported abstinence from alcohol and drugs. The findings of this study align with work of Krentzman et al. (2013) especially, the submission that TSPs led to substantial increase in both private religious and daily spiritual practices. Inferred from the present findings are an improved sense of self-efficacy with respect to maintaining sobriety as well as increased hope for the future and these are consistent with the findings of Bell et al. (2022) with respect to TSP participants. A sense of belonging, care, and authenticity in this

population was demonstrated by Rodriguez-Morales (2020) and corresponds to participant descriptions of their experiences in the present study. The participants' responses in this study also reflect the centrality of God as their higher power and His role in their sobriety, consistent with the findings of Arnaud (2015).

In terms of prayer research, the present findings align with previous research suggesting a link between prayer and closeness with God (Jeppsen et al., 2022). This aspect was reported by most participants in this study without having been asked directly about it. An area of divergence in this research is that in previous work by Jeppsen et al (2015), results showed petitionary prayers were associated with lower mental health. The present findings suggested all participants engaging in this form of prayer demonstrated positive elements of mental health. The frequency or ratio of this type of prayer was not examined, which limits the ability to effectively compare these results. The participants in this study alluded to using a receptive form of prayer as well as increased closeness to God, a link that has been shown to have a significant correlation (Monroe & Jankowski, 2016). The lived experiences herein associated with prayer seem supportive of quantitative literature.

One area of divergence from James' (1997) work is that participants typically reported lasting effects of their spiritual experiences, which contrasts with James' assertion that these experiences were transient. There is a corroborating sense of transience in the experience itself though the positive results were reported to be longstanding or permanent. James' (1997) noetic quality is evidenced in the present findings in that participants universally described experiences with knowledge, illumination, and revelation. Evidently, the passive characteristic described by James (1997) was seen to a certain extent in what was shared by Bob and Amy in the sense that they reported experiences of being immersed in God's presence in such a way that their own will

was overtaken. This characteristic was by no means universal in that most participants' responses did not reflect any sense of loss of will, despite reporting an increased knowledge of God's will and being caught up in positive emotions associated with the experiences.

The present findings add to the scholarly literature a unique perspective of Christians participating in TSPs and CTSPs that is nearly entirely unrepresented in research. The ways in which Christians experiences stand out in these results are using the Bible, understanding prayer as being to the God of the Bible, and often understanding spiritual awakening as an expression of being converted, regenerated, or born-again, as expressed in scripture (Tit 3:5; John 3:3). It is unclear from this study the extent to which Christians' experiences coincide with that of non-Christians with respect to these phenomena, but strong differences in worship and understanding of spiritual truth were observed in terms of who God is and the source of His truth and revelation. An unexpected finding in this study was that majority participants described a growth in their understanding and practice of their Christian faith as a result of their participation in TSPs.

## Implications

This section presents the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study. It also includes recommendations for various stakeholders involved with the addiction recovery population.

### Theoretical Implications

This study confirms a variety of theoretical underpinnings, including the central role of meaning and its impact on the quality of the lived experiences of human beings (May, 1996). Given the impact of having an absence of meaning in terms of increased likelihood for substance use to recovering individuals (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999; Csabonyi &

Phillips, 2020), the implications of the present study are that meaning itself is a worthwhile aim for interventions aimed at producing change. Examining sources and barriers to meaning in the lives of addicted persons might be a valuable tool in a variety of therapies beyond the existential approach, which relate to similar concepts such as values. The implications of these results with respect to transpersonal therapy might be the idea from transpersonal therapy of the importance of unity (Wittine, 1989), which surfaces to some degree in these findings in the sense of unity in fellowship with other TSP members described by participants Chris and George. A further transpersonal notion (Wittine, 1989), which is also common to biblical Christianity is the need to transcend the limitations of one's personal identity (John 3:3). The present study implies the existence of this need and value of that transcendence within the personal narratives of lived experience offered by Christians in addiction recovery.

In terms of biblical Christianity, the present findings have implications including the apparent absence of understanding among the stories of some Christians about the existence of meditative practices aligned with biblical teachings and supported by notable figures in Church history. The Christians in these narratives had little or no understanding of these historical and biblical roots, leaving them to limit their meditative practices to secular forms of meditation often derived from the practices of other religions such as Buddhism (Johnson, 2019). Given the importance of biblical literacy in the biblical Christian worldview (Matt 4:4; Matt 7:24 & 26; Ps 119:105), a major implication of this study is that few participants seemed to emphasize the role of scripture in shaping their understandings of God, prayer, meditation, or spiritual awakening. This seems to leave more room for Christians in these settings to derive their conceptions of these phenomena from non-biblical sources that might in some cases contradict biblical teaching.

**Empirical Implications**

The empirical implications of this study entail that it adds to the scholarly understanding of the lived experiences of Christians participating in TSPs and CTSPs and expresses their unique particularities. This study helps to address the gap in literature related to Christians in these settings generally, and Christians engaging in the practices in particular. The interpretive phenomenological approach used in this study involved a detailed thematic analysis of the lived experiences of Christians interviewed with regard to their experience with these phenomena.

The study results are consistent with previous work demonstrating the value of practices such as prayer (Jeppsen et al., 2022; Monroe & Jankowski, 2016) and meditation (Gu et al., 2018; Lan et al., 2018) in terms of the self-reported lived experiences of these participants. Despite the qualitative nature of the results in contrast to outcome studies, the real lived experiences of Christians in these programs offer reflection about the nature of these phenomena, which is inaccessible to quantitative approaches. The ways in which individuals describe and make meaning of these experiences is of significant value to those who would seek to better understand the needs and particularities of this population. Given the dearth of studies like this one, the implications by comparison in that regard cannot be achieved.

**Practical Implications**

A variety of practical implications exist for individuals who interact with this population such as clinicians, administrators, peer recovery personnel, treatment funders, pastors/church leaders, and researchers. Further implications of the above expressed benefit of unity (Wittine, 1989) lies in the value of clinicians and other change agents working with Christians in addiction recovery to encourage fellowship in TSPs, CTSPs, and/or in Church settings to promote the benefits of unity expressed in community. Clinicians might also want to be attuned to the

particularities for Christians including reference to the scriptural sources of truth and interaction of faith with participation in TSPs. For example, comprehending distinctively Christian understandings in this population of spiritual awakening as conversion experiences in which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within Christians (1 Cor 3:16; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Ezek 36:36; 2 Tim1:14; Rom 8:11). This means the implications of these experiences are permanent (1 Pet 1:23) rather than transient and need to be understood through a spiritual, rather than cognitive lens. Pastors and other Christian leaders might consider the need for increased biblical emphasis and education for Christians in recovery as well as exposure to distinctively Christian forms of meditation.

## Delimitations and Limitations

A number of delimitations were included in this study including the 18+ age requirement, having practiced both TSPs and CTSPs, and limiting participation to Christians. The age requirement was included because nearly all of the recovery activities related to TSPs occur within the context of adults. The decision to include both TSPs and CTSPs was made due to the disproportionately higher number of TSPs as compared to CTSPs. As a result, most localities have few, if any, opportunities to engage in CTSPS, which means Christians were often limited to TSPs and this study sought to capture their experiences. In terms of limiting participation to Christians in those groups, the decision was based on a particular interest in their experiences and how the elements of their faith might be unique in comparison to non-Christian participants.

The limitations of the study include having only Christians only without the understanding of participants from other faiths, agnostics, or atheists. The study was also limited to a small number of participants and a singular understanding of Christian identity (i.e. The Apostles' Creed). Using the Apostles' Creed was an unexpected barrier in that elements of its

wording were confusing to potential participants, who were not sure if its reference to the Catholic church meant they had to be part of the Catholic religion. The decision to include it presupposed a particular understanding of the lower-case use of the word catholic as distinct from the Catholic church which uses the capitalized form of the word.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Completing this research enhanced the understanding of these phenomena as they relate to Christian participants as well as the opportunities to broaden the scholarly understanding of how these phenomena could be experienced by a wider population. Future research should include a more well-defined definition of Christian identity, exploration of non-Christian samples, and study of the perceptions of Christians with respect to how compatible the Twelve Steps are with their faith, church, and previous spiritual experiences.  This section explores each of these sections in more detail to offer future researchers thoughts on areas of continued scholarly inquiry.

The constitutive elements of the Christian identity might not universally agreed upon in that some self-identified Christians and denominations have a broad view of what makes one a Christian, whereas others limit the criteria to particular agreements on various matters of biblical doctrine. Others add to the doctrinal agreements various evidence of faith stipulated in the Bible such as love for other Christians (1 John 3:14) and a desire to know God (Ps 42:1). This Christian heterogeneity is the basis for the recommendation that a more well-defined, simpler definition of Christianity be used when screening potential participants for future research.

## Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Christians with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening as a result of prayer and

meditation within the context of steps 11 and 12 of Twelve Step Programs (TSPs) and Christian Twelve Step Programs (CTSPs). The theories guiding this study were existential and transpersonal therapy as well as biblical Christianity. A convenience sample of seven Christians was recruited via social media and email using snowball sampling. Participants completed detailed interviews on their experiences with these phenomena and the meaning they derived from their experiences with them. Data was analyzed and revealed three themes including relationship with and presence of God; clarity, understanding, and direction; and transformation.

The study contributed to a better understanding of Christians' experiences with these spiritual phenomena in its answers to the research questions. On the first question it is clear from these results that Christians experience CCWG in the context of regular, ongoing, and purposeful communication with a God who hears and responds to them in meaningful ways. This occurrence happens through a combination of prayer and meditation, which were described as critical components for the experience of CCWG, answering the second research question. The final research question with respect to spiritual awakening was answered through rich descriptions of a wide range of experiences that provided insight, positive emotion, and new directions and demonstrable change in the lives of participants. These experiences were deeply imbued with meaning. Far different from other significant experiences in their lives, the CCWG experienced shaped their relationship with God. These awakening experiences also seem to serve as touchstones in participants' personal walk or relationship with God, which they look back on and continue to draw meaning from at various times.

The most salient takeaway from this study of first-hand accounts of the personal experiences of Christians in addiction recovery includes the realization that Christians have uniquely expressed characteristics and needs in recovery, which might impact their ability to

receive high quality care and support by individuals in their supportive sphere of influence. These experiences include an understanding of a personal relationship and felt presence of a personal God who they could grow in knowledge with over time through the involvement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This element is relevant to clinicians' supportive personnel who interact with Christians who might be less familiar with the God of the Bible or in working with participants who worship and are led by Him. Overall, the study adds to the scholarly canon in a way that addresses a significant gap in the literature with respect to this population and its interaction with CCWG and spiritual awakening. These phenomena clearly have strong applicability to Christians and extend beyond the traditional conceptions of the secular forms of TSP for these same phenomena. Christians have a distinctly personal God, identified in the Bible with whom they engage in conscious contact and their spiritual awakenings at least in some cases are linked to the experience of receiving Holy Spirit at conversion and in other cases might represent other aspects of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian believer.

# References

Ahmadi, M., Zaree, K., Anoushirvan, K. L., & Akram Sadat, S. H. (2019). Efficacy of a written

 prayer technique on the anxiety of mothers of children with cancer. *Palliative & Supportive*

 *Care, 17*(1), 54-59. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1478951518000743

Alcoholics Anonymous (n.d.). The twelve steps. https://www.aa.org/the-twelve-steps Twelve steps

 and twelve traditions. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2002). Alcoholics anonymous. (4th ed.). Alcoholics

 Anonymous World Services, Inc.

Aldiqs, M. A., & Hamdan-Mansour, A. M. (2021). The role of religion and spirituality in alcohol use

 treatment and recovery: An integrative review. *Medico-Legal Update*, *21*(1), 599–605.

 https://doi.org/10.37506/mlu.v21i1.2377

American Counseling Association. (2014). 2014 ACA code of

 ethics. https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2014-code-

 of ethics-finaladdress.pdf

American Psychological Association. (2017). Ethical principles of psychologists *and code of*

 *conduct* (2002, amended effective June 1, 2010, and January 1,

 2017). https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/

Ammerman, N. T. (2013). Spiritual but not religious?: Beyond binary choices in the study of religion.

 *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 52(2)*, 258–278. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12024

Andreu, C. I., Cosmelli, D., Slagter, H. A., & Franken, I. H. A. (2018). Effects of a brief mindfulness-

 meditation intervention on neural measures of response inhibition in cigarette smokers. *PLOS*

 *ONE*, *13*(1), e0191661. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191661

Arnaud, Y. (2015). AA Members Understandings of the Higher Power (HP) A Qualitative Study.

    *Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy*, *06*(02). https://doi.org/10.4172/2155-

    6105.1000233

Baesler, E. J. (2002). Prayer and relationship with God II: replication and extension of the relational

    prayer model. *Review of Religious Research*, *44*(1), 58. https://doi.org/10.2307/3512157

Bell, J. S., Islam, M., Bobak, T., Ferrari, J. R., & Jason, L. A. (2022). Spiritual awakening in 12-step

    recovery: Impact among residential aftercare residents. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000296

Bluma, L. (2018). The role of spirituality in alcohol abstinence self-efficacy amongst alcoholics

    anonymous members. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, *18*(4), 227–239.

    https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-09-2017-0049

Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bradshaw, M., & Kent, B. V. (2018). Prayer, attachment to God, and changes in psychological well-

    being in later life. *Journal of Aging and Health*, *30*(5), 667–691.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264316688116

Brown, A. E., Tonigan, J. S., Pavlik, V. N., Kosten, T. R., & Volk, R. J. (2013). Spirituality and

    confidence to resist substance use among celebrate recovery participants. *Journal of Religion*

    *and Health*, *52*(1), 107–113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9456-x

Carcary, M. (2020). The research audit trail: Methodological guidance for application in practice.

    *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, *18*(2).

    https://doi.org/10.34190/JBRM.18.2.008

Casey, P. M. (2019). Conversion to Islam: Narratives of awakening, continuity, and return.

    *Sociological Forum*, *34*(3), 752–773. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12523

Celebrate Recovery (n.d.). Celebrate recovery 12 steps and biblical comparisons.

https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/12steps

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1999). Brief interventions and brief therapies for substance

abuse. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Treatment Improvement

Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 34. Chapter 6 --Brief Humanistic and Existential

Therapies.  https://www-ncbi-nlm-nih-gov.ezproxy.liberty.edu/books/NBK64939/

Ceylan, M. E., Dönmez, A., Ünsalver, B. Ö., Evrensel, A., & Kaya Yertutanol, F. D. (2017). The

soul, as an uninhibited mental activity, is reduced into consciousness by rules of quantum

physics. Integrative Physiological and Behavioral Science, 51(4), 582-597.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-017-9395-5

Choi, E.-H., Chun, M. Y., Lee, I., Yoo, Y.-G., & Kim, M.-J. (2020). The effect of mind subtraction

meditation intervention on smartphone addiction and the psychological wellbeing among

adolescents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(9), 3263.

https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093263

Churakova, I., Burlaka, V., & Parker, T. W. (2017). Relationship between alcohol use, spirituality,

and coping. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *15*(4), 842–852.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-017-9759-6

Cook, C., Powell, A., & Sims, A. (2010). Spirituality and psychiatry. Royal College of Psychiatrists

RCPsych Publications.

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative

research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41(1),* 89-91.

https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-

journals/methods-meanings-credibility-trustworthiness/docview/1476482511/se-2

Cornielle, J. S., & Luke, D. (2021). Spontaneous Spiritual Awakenings: Phenomenology, Altered

    States, Individual Differences, and Well-Being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 720579.

    https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.720579

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five*

    *approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Cruz, R. F., & Tantia, J. F. (2017). Reading and Understanding Qualitative Research. American

    *Journal of Dance Therapy, 39(1)*, 79–92. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-016-9219-z

Csabonyi, M., & Phillips, L. J. (2020). Meaning in Life and Substance Use. *Journal of Humanistic*

    *Psychology*, *60*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167816687674

Day, M. A., Matthews, N., Mattingley, J. B., Ehde, D. M., Turner, A. P., Williams, R. M., & Jensen,

    M. P. (2021). Change in Brain Oscillations as a Mechanism of Mindfulness-Meditation,

    Cognitive Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Chronic Low Back Pain.

    *Pain Medicine*, *22*(8), 1804–1813. https://doi.org/10.1093/pm/pnab049

de Castro, J. M. (2015). Meditation has stronger relationships with mindfulness, kundalini, and

    mystical experiences than yoga or prayer. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *35*, 115–127.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2015.04.022

de Castro, J. M. (2017). A model of enlightened/mystical/awakened experience. *Psychology of*

    *Religion and Spirituality, 9(1)*, 34–45.  https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/rel0000037

Dein, S. (2010). Judeo-Christian religious experience and psychopathology: The legacy of William

    James. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 47(4)*, 523–547. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461510377568

Deshmukh, V. D. (2006). Neuroscience of meditation. *Sci. World J.* 6 2239–2253.

    https://doi.org/10.1100/tsw.2006.353

Dick, B. (1992). The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous: A design for living that works. Paradise Research Publications.

Dillon, A. (2021). Bible Journaling as a Spiritual Aid in Addiction Recovery. Religions, 12(11), 965. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110965

Dionysius, A. (2011). Theologia mystica: Being the treatise of St. Dionysius, pseudo-areopagite, on mystical theology, together with the first and fifth epistles (A. Watts, Trans.). Literary Licensing, LLC. (Original work published 528)

Dossett, W. (2013). Addiction, spirituality and 12-step programmes. International Social Work, 56(3), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872813475689

Dossett, W., & Metcalf-White, L. (2020). Religion, spirituality and addiction recovery: Introduction. *Implicit Religion*, *22*(2), 95–100. https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.40695

Dryden, W., & Still, A. (2006). Historical aspects of mindfulness and self-acceptance in psychotherapy. Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 24(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-006-0026-1

English Standard Version Bible. (2001). ESV Online. https://esv.literalword.com/

Fairbairn, C. E., Briley, D. A., Kang, D., Fraley, R. C., Hankin, B. L., & Ariss, T. (2018). A meta-analysis of longitudinal associations between substance use and interpersonal attachment security. Psychological Bulletin, 144(5), 532–555. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000141.

Feigenbaum, J. C. (2013). A Historical Review of Perceptions of Key Aspects of Spirituality and Religion Within Alcoholics Anonymous. *Journal of Addictions Nursing*, *24*(4), 229–236. https://doi.org/10.1097/JAN.0000000000000004

Ferguson, J. K., Willemsen, E. W., & Castañeto, M. V. (2010). Centering Prayer as a Healing

Response to Everyday Stress: A Psychological and Spiritual Process. *Pastoral Psychology*,

*59*(3), 305–329. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-009-0225-7

Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., Lambert, N., Stillman, T., & Braithwaite, S. (2008). Spiritual

behaviors and relationship satisfaction: A critical analysis of the role of prayer. *Journal of*

*Social and Clinical Psychology*, *27*(4), 362–388. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2008.27.4.362

Foster, R. (1998). *Streams of living water: Essential practices from the six great traditions of the*

*Christian faith.* Harper Collins.

Fox, J., Gutierrez, D., Haas, J., & Durnford, S. (2016). Centering prayer's effects on psycho-spiritual

outcomes: A pilot outcome study. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *19*(4), 379–392.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2016.1203299

Galanter, M., Josipovic, Z., Dermatis, H., Weber, J., & Millard, M. A. (2017). An initial fMRI study

on neural correlates of prayer in members of Alcoholics Anonymous. *The American Journal*

*of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, *43*(1), 44–54. https://doi.org/10.3109/00952990.2016.1141912

Galanter, M., White, W. L., Ziegler, P. P., & Hunter, B. (2020). An empirical study on the construct

of "God" in the Twelve Step process. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*,

*46*(6), 731–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/00952990.2020.1789870

Gallup, G. H. Jr. (2003). Religious Awakenings Bolster Americans' Faith. Available online at:

https://news.gallup.com/poll/7582/religious-awakeningsbolster-americans-faith.aspx (accessed

October 8, 2022)

Ghahremani, D. G. (2017). Craving, prayer, and the brain. *The American Journal of Drug and*

*Alcohol Abuse*, *43*(1), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1080/00952990.2016.1200061

Griffiths, R. R., Richards, W. A., McCann, U., & Jesse, R. (2006). Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance. *Psychopharmacology*, *187*(3), 268–283. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-006-0457-5

Grof, C., & Grof, S. (2017). Spiritual emergency: The understanding and treatment of transpersonal crises. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *36*(2), 30–43. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.30

Gu, Q., Hou, J.-C., & Fang, X.-M. (2018). Mindfulness Meditation for Primary Headache Pain: A Meta-Analysis. *Chinese Medical Journal*, *131*(7), 829–838. https://doi.org/10.4103/0366-6999.228242

Gustavo, D., Diego, V., & Kringelbach, M. L. (2021). Revisiting the global workspace orchestrating the hierarchical organization of the human brain. Nature Human Behaviour, 5(4), 497-511. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-01003-6

Gutierrez, I. A., Chapman, H., Grubbs, J. B., & Grant, J. (2020). Religious and spiritual struggles among military veterans in a residential gambling treatment programme. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *23*(2), 187–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2020.1764513

Hahn, J. L. (2020). 'God As We Understood Him': Being 'Spiritual But Not Religious' in Alcoholics Anonymous. *Implicit Religion*, *22*(2), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.37778

Hai, A. H., Franklin, C., Park, S., DiNitto, D. M., & Aurelio, N. (2019). The efficacy of spiritual/religious interventions for substance use problems: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, *202*, 134–148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.04.045

Hai, A. H., Wigmore, B., Franklin, C., Shorkey, C., von Sternberg, K., Cole, A. H., & DiNitto, D. M. (2021). Efficacy of two-way prayer meditation in improving the psychospiritual well-being of

people with substance use disorders: A pilot randomized controlled trial. *Substance Abuse*, *42*(4), 832–841. https://doi.org/10.1080/08897077.2020.1865244

Humphreys, K., Barreto, N. B., Alessi, S. M., Carroll, K. M., Crits-Christoph, P., Donovan, D. M., Kelly, J. F., Schottenfeld, R. S., Timko, C., & Wagner, T. H. (2020). Impact of 12 step mutual help groups on drug use disorder patients across six clinical trials. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, *215*, 108213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2020.108213

James, W. (1997). The varieties of religious experience.  In Book of the Month Club, Inc. (Ed.). *Selected writings.*(pp. 23-541). Book of the Month Club, Inc. (Original work published 1902)

Janis, I. (2022). Strategies for establishing dependability between two qualitative intrinsic case studies: A reflexive thematic analysis. *Field Methods*, *34*(3), 240–255. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X211069636

Jeppsen, B., Pössel, P., Black, S. W., Bjerg, A., & Wooldridge, D. (2015). Closeness and control: exploring the relationship between prayer and mental health. *Counseling and Values*, *60*(2), 164–185. https://doi.org/10.1002/cvj.12012

Jeppsen, B., Winkeljohn Black, S., Pössel, P., & Rosmarin, D. H. (2022). Does closeness to God mediate the relationship between prayer and mental health in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim samples? *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *25*(1), 99–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2021.2024801

Johnson, R. L. L. (2019). A Brief History of Mindfulness in Addictions Treatment. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *41*(2), 284–295. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-019-09372-y

Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. (2017). Potential therapeutic effects of psilocybin. *Neurotherapeutics*, *14*(3), 734–740. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13311-017-0542-y

Jones, R., & Gellham, J. (2022). Mysticism.  In E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2022 Edition)*.  Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/mysticism

Jung, C. G. (1961). *Letter to Bill W*. New York, NY: AA Grapevine

Kelly, J. F. (2017). Is Alcoholics Anonymous religious, spiritual, neither? Findings from 25 years of mechanisms of behavior change research. *Addiction*, *112*(6), 929–936. https://doi.org/10.1111/add.13590

Kerlin, A. M. (2020). Women in Christian Substance Abuse Treatment; Forgiveness, Attachment Styles, and Improvements in Co-occurring Mental Health Symptoms. Journal of Religion and Health, 59(6), 3168-3192. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00948-x

Keickhefer, R. (2004). Mystical experience and the definition of Christian Mysticism. In T. Ryba, G. D. Bond & H. Tull (Eds.), *The comity and grace of method: Essays in Honor of Edmund F. Perry,* (pp. 198–143). Northwestern University Press. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.4968

Kime, K. G. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis of the spiritual characteristics of recovery experiences in the context of the brain disease model of addiction. *Pastoral Psychology*, *67*(4), 357–372. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0816-2

Klemm, W. R. (2020). God spots in the brain: Nine categories of unasked, unanswered questions. *Religions, 11(9)*, 468. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090468

Knabb, J. J. (2012). Centering Prayer as an Alternative to Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression Relapse Prevention. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *51*(3), 908–924. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-010-9404-1

Knabb, J. J., & Vazquez, V. E. (2018). A randomized controlled trial of a 2-week internet-based

    contemplative prayer program for Christians with daily stress. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*,

    *5*(1), 37–53. https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000154

Knabb, J. (2021). *Christian meditation in clinical practice: A four step model and workbook for*

    *therapists and clients*.  Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books.

Knabb, J. J., Vazquez, V. E., Garzon, F. L., Ford, K. M., Wang, K. T., Conner, K. W., Warren, E, S.,

    & Weston, D. M. (2020). Christian meditation for repetitive negative thinking: A multisite

    randomized trial examining the effects of a 4-week preventative program. *Spirituality in*

    *Clinical Practice*, *7*(1), 34. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/scp0000206

Krentzman, A. R., Cranford, J. A., & Robinson, E. A. R. (2013). Multiple Dimensions of Spirituality

    in Recovery: A Lagged Mediational Analysis of Alcoholics Anonymous' Principal

    Theoretical Mechanism of Behavior Change. *Substance Abuse*, *34*(1), 20–32.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/08897077.2012.691449

Lancaster, B. L. (2018). Re-veiling the revealed: Insights into the psychology of "enlightenment"

    from the Kabbalah.  *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *37*(2).

    https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2018.37.2.73

Lan, Y., Ding, J.-E., Li, W., Li, J., Zhang, Y., Liu, M., & Fu, H. (2018). A pilot study of a group

    mindfulness-based cognitive-behavioral intervention for smartphone addiction among

    university students. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, *7*(4), 1171–1176.

    https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.7.2018.103

Lattin, D. (2012). Distilled spirits: Getting high, then sober, with a famous writer, a forgotten

    philosopher, and a hopeless drunk. University of California Press.

Lau, H., & Rosenthal, D. (2011). Empirical support for higher-order theories of conscious

    awareness. *Trends in cognitive sciences, 15(8)*, 365–373. https://doi-

    org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1016/j.tics.2011.05.009

Life Recovery Groups (n.d.). The 12 steps.  https://liferecoverygroups.com/the-12-steps/

Lo, P.-C., Tsai, P.-H., Kang, H.-J., & Miao Tian, W. J. (2019). Cardiorespiratory and autonomic-

    nervous-system functioning of drug abusers treated by Zen meditation. *Journal of Traditional*

    *and Complementary Medicine*, *9*(3), 215–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtcme.2018.01.005

Lusnig, L., Radach, R., Mueller, C. J., & Hofmann, M. J. (2020). Zen meditation neutralizes

    emotional evaluation, but not implicit affective processing of words. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(2),

    e0229310. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229310

Mandelkow, L., Austad, A., & Freund, H. (2022). Stepping carefully on sacred ground: Religion and

    spirituality in psychotherapy. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, *24*(3), 288–308.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2021.1939834

Marcinechova, D., & Zahorcova, L. (2020). Sexual satisfaction, sexual attitudes, and shame in

    relation to religiosity. Sexuality & Culture, 24(6), 1913-1928. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-

    020-09727-3

May, R. (1996). Psychology and the human dilemma. New York: Norton.

McInerney, K., & Cross, A. (2021). A phenomenological study: Exploring the meaning of spirituality

    in long-term recovery in alcoholics anonymous. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, *39*(3), 282–

    300. https://doi.org/10.1080/07347324.2021.1895016

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Conscious. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved September 11,

    2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscious

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Contact. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved

Monroe, N., & Jankowski, P. J. (2016). The effectiveness of a prayer intervention in promoting change in perceived attachment to God, positive affect, and psychological distress. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, *3*(4), 237–249. https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000117

Moustakas. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Sage.

Njus, D. M., & Scharmer, A. (2020). Evidence that God attachment makes a unique contribution to psychological well-being. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *30*(3), 178–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1723296

Overeaters Anonymous (n.d.).  How does the program work? https://oa.org/

Peoples, H. C., Duda, P., & Marlowe, F. W. (2016). Hunter-gatherers and the origins of Religion. *Human Nature*, *27*(3), 261–282. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-016-9260-0

Pitchford, D. B. (2009). The existentialism of Rollo May: An influence on trauma treatment. *Journal*

Reddit, P. L. (2008). *Introduction to the prophets.* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Roca, P., Vazquez, C., Diez, G., Brito-Pons, G., & McNally, R. J. (2021). Not all types of meditation are the same: Mediators of change in mindfulness and compassion meditation interventions. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *283*, 354–362. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.01.070

Rodriguez-Morales, L. (2020). "That's the spiritual side of me": Men's autobiographical accounts of recovery in twelve Step fellowships. *Implicit Religion*, *22*(2), 161–183. https://doi.org/10.1558/imre.38499

Russell, E., Phillips, III., Lukoff, D., & Stone, M. K. (2009). Integrating the spirit within psychosis: Alternative conceptualizations of psychotic disorders. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 41(1),* 61.

Sakakibara, M. (2022). Evaluation of Heart Rate Variability and Application of Heart Rate Variability Biofeedback: Toward Further Research on Slow-Paced Abdominal Breathing in Zen

Meditation. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10484-022-09546-2

Shim, J. Y. (2021). The study of a Christian 12-Step Program for Christian Smartphone-Addicted Adolescents: A Biblical Perspective. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *60*(3), 1780–1795. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01170-w

Slevin, E., & Sines, D. (2000). Enhancing the truthfulness, consistency and transferability of a qualitative study: Utilising a manifold of approaches. *Nurse Researcher (through 2013), 7(2),* 79. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enhancing-truthfulness-consistency/docview/200819635/se-2

Sundin, M., & Lilja, J. (2019). Substance use and strategies to avoid relapses following treatment: A narrative approach with clients undertaking a twelve-step program in Sweden. *Journal of Substance Use*, *24*(2), 125–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2018.1523959

Taylor, S., (2016). From philosophy to phenomenology: The argument for a "soft" perennialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 35(2)*, 17–41.

Taylor, S. & Egeto-Szabo, K. (2017). Exploring awakening experiences: A study of awakening experiences in terms of their triggers, characteristics, duration, and aftereffects. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 49*(1), 45-65. https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/exploring-awakening-experiences-study-terms-their/docview/2001373916/se-2

Tisdale, J. R. (1994). Transpersonal Psychology and Jesus's Kingdom of God. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *34*(3), 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678940343004

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work, 11,* https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010368316.

Twenge, J. M., Sherman, R. A., Exline, J. J., & Grubbs, J. B. (2016). Declines in American adults'

    religious participation and beliefs, 1972-2014. *SAGE Open*, *6*(1), 215824401663813.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016638133

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

    Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2020). *National Survey*

    *on Drug Use and Health 2020*. Retrieved from

    https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt35325/NSDUHFFRPDFWHTMLFi

    les2020/2020NSDUHFFR1PDFW102121.pdf

Van der Merwe, D. (2018). The characterisation of the Spiritual Christian: In conversation with God

    according to 1 Corinthians 2. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, *74*(3).

    https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/215049

VanderWeele, T. J. (2017). Religious Communities and Human Flourishing. *Current Directions in*

    *Psychological Science*, *26*(5), 476–481. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417721526

Volenik, A. (2021). Spiritual Principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. *Psychiatria Danubina*, *33*(Suppl

    4), 974–980. https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/395085

Wahbeh, H., Sagher, A., Back, W., Pundhir, P., & Travis, F. (2018). A Systematic Review of

    Transcendent States Across Meditation and Contemplative Traditions. *EXPLORE*, *14*(1), 19–

    35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2017.07.007

Walsh, R., Shapiro S. L. (2006). The meeting of meditative disciplines and western psychology: a

    mutually enriching dialogue. *Am. Psychol.* 61:227. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-

    066x.61.3.227

Wittine, B. (1989). Basic postulates for a transpersonal psychotherapy. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling

    (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of*

    *human experience* (pp. 269–287). Plenum Press.

Wnuk, M. (2021). Indirect relationship between Alcoholics Anonymous spirituality and their

    hopelessness: The role of meaning in life, hope, and abstinence duration. *Religions*, *12*(11),

    934. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110934

Zeligman, M., Ataga, J., & Shaw, Z. (2020). Posttraumatic growth in trauma survivors: Associations

    with attachment to God and God representation. *Counseling and Values*, *65*(2), 155–169.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/cvj.12135

**Appendix A: Recruitment, Social Media**

Attention: I am conducting research as part of the requirement for: doctoral degree in Community Care & Counseling: Marriage and Family at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to describe how Christians in Twelve Step Programs experience conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation as well as spiritual awakening.  To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, be a Christian, have participated in Twelve Step Programs for at least 6 months and have engaged in step 11 prayer and meditation. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview and review their transcript for accuracy. The interview will be conducted virtually to ask questions related to these topics. The interview should take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy. One week later, I will send an email, which will include a copy of the interview transcript for the participants to clarify and validate the data collected. Two weeks after the interview, I will send a second email to express my gratitude for participating in my study.

A consent form will be emailed to you prior to interview. Please type your name on the consent form. The type-signed consent form must be returned to via email prior to scheduling the interview.

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Christians' Experiences of Conscious Contact with God and Spiritual Awakening in Twelve Step Programs
**Principal Investigator:** John D. Goddard, MS, CAADC, Doctoral Candidate Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years old. You must identify as a Christian and have participated in a Twelve Step Program for at least 6 months and have engaged in step 11 prayer and meditation. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the various experiences Christians in Twelve Step Programs have engaging in prayer and meditation and how those relate to the concepts of 'conscious contact with God' and 'spiritual awakening' as described in steps 11 and 12. The goal is to understand the meaning assigned to these experiences and how that influences your faith and participation in Twelve Step Programs.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Attend a virtual or in-person (if local) interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes in length and will be audio recorded for accuracy. The interview will assess your experiences with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening through prayer and meditation.
2. Review your interview transcript for accuracy. Approximately one week later, I will send an email containing a copy of the transcript to clarify and validate the data collected.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

The participants should expect to receive direct benefits from taking part in this study in the form of a gift card described below. Benefits to society include deepening the understanding of what it's like for Christians to engage in spiritual practices in Twelve Step Programs.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

Researcher is a mandated reporter of child abuse and elder abuse in Pennsylvania which means that any information shared in this study that causes suspicion that an act of these has taken place

must be reported to the proper authorities.  In addition, expressed thoughts relating to an intention to harm oneself or others must be reported.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private, and participants' identities will not appear in research results.  Research records will be stored securely, and available only to the researcher. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be confidential. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and paper documentation (if any) will be shredded.  Only researcher will have access to the data unless and until it is made anonymous before sharing.

### How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study as follows.
- $10 electronic gift card to Amazon.com to be sent by email at the completion of the study.

### What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There should be no direct costs to students other than transportation to and from the interviews (if local).

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study John D. Goddard. You may ask him any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ████████████████████████. You can also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Mollie Boyd at █████████████████

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, ████ ██████████████████████████████████████████████████████.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to [audio-record/video-record/photograph] me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

**Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

The purpose of the proposed study is to examine the experiences of Christian participants in Twelve Step Program with conscious contact with God and spiritual awakening through prayer and meditation. The research questions guiding this study are: How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs describe their experience of conscious contact with God? How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs describe their experiences of prayer and meditation and the relationship of these practices to conscious contact with God. How do Christian participants of Twelve Step programs describe spiritual awakening, as described in step twelve?"

The participants in this study are Christian participants of Twelve Step Programs with at least six months of participation. I will explain the purpose of the study to the interviewees, thank him/her for participating, and ask the following questions:

11. How long have you participated in Twelve Step Program(s)?

12. How long have you been a Christian?

13. How long have you been praying?  Meditating?

14. How has your experience of prayer/meditation changed as a result of participating in Twelve Step Programs?

15. Describe your experience of conscious contact with God.

16. Describe your experience of spiritual awakening.

17. Describe your experience of prayer in the 11$^{th}$ step.

18. Describe your experience of meditation in the 11$^{th}$ step.

19. How does prayer contribute to conscious contact with God.  To spiritual awakening?

20. How does meditation contribute to conscious contact with God.  To spiritual awakening?

**Appendix D: Permission to Recruit Participants**

NEWLIFE
(800)-NEW-LIFE
newlife.com

November 9, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

John Goddard has the permission of New Life Ministries and Life Recovery Groups to utilize the Life Recovery Groups Directory and the Life Recovery Facebook Community Group to recruit volunteers to participate in his dissertation study.

Blessings,

**Terri Ward**
Life Recovery Groups Coordinator
New Life Ministries
1-800-NEW-LIFE

**Appendix E: Permission to Use Facilities**

**Pennsylvania Bible Teaching Fellowship**
Doers of God's Word

November 1st, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,
    This letter confirms that we, PA Bible, give permission to John Goddard to use our church building to conduct participant interviews for the completion of his dissertation study.

Sincerely,

Pastor Sam Pittenger
Vice President

www.pabibletf.org

**Appendix F: IRB Approval**

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 17, 2023

John Goddard
Mollie Boyd

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-841 CHRISTIANS' EXPERIENCES OF CONSCIOUS CONTACT WITH GOD AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING WITHIN TWELVE STEP PROGRAMS

Dear John Goddard, Mollie Boyd,

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 to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption 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 exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at

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