

Messianic Dance for Self-reported Relief from Symptoms of Depression:

A Phenomenological Study

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Department of Community Care and Counseling Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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### Abstract

This phenomenological study aimed to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. The findings showed that stakeholders such as Christian therapists could find Messianic dance useful as a Scriptural physical activity, or complementary therapies for improvements in mood well-being. The theories guiding this study included foundations of dance movement therapy (DMT) by Chace (Robyn, 2018), Bowlby's attachment theory in the form of Jewish (Pirutinsky et al., 2019), and Christian studies on God attachment (Wilder et al., 2020), religious encounters that decreased symptoms of depression (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Granqvist, 2021; Topalian, 2016), physical activity related to happiness and mood betterment (Killingback et al., 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2019) and biblical foundations of what praise and worship are, (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-27, 2 Samuel 6:14-22, Psalms 149:3, 150:4, 150:6). The study strived to answer the following research question and sub-question: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? How do participants in a Messianic Dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? The design for this study was based on Curry and Nunez (2015). Data collection involved attending a Messianic dance workshop, completing a post-test questionnaire, and a Zoom interview. The data was analyzed by using journaling, phenomenological reduction, Husserl's Free Imaginative Variation method (Heppner et al., 2016), and synthesis of meanings and themes. Four main themes emerged: God is in the Midst, People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth, There is a Sense of Community, and Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise. There were also 13 subthemes. There has been no research on this topic until now.

*Keywords:* Messianic dance, depression, Judaism, dance movement therapy

**Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to Yeshua who called me out of darkness into His wonderful light, and to all those individuals who have found relief from symptoms of depression while dancing unto the God of Israel.

### **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge my husband for supporting and encouraging me through this long scholastic journey. The same may be said of our children. I share this accomplishment with them as they loved me through the many hours of sitting and studying at obscure desks throughout the world. As well, I would like to thank Dr. Walter Thomas, my Chair. He has given profound and godly critique.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Messianic Dance Camps International (MDCI)

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS)

World Health Organization (WHO)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Overview**

This is the dissertation document for doctoral candidate, Mindy Seta. The work is entitled, *Messianic Dance for Self-Reported Relief from Symptoms of Depression: A Phenomenological Study*. This dissertation will hopefully answer the questions: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? How do participants in a Messianic Dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? Chapter One includes background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

### **Background**

#### **Historical Background**

Messianic dance seems to converge on many spiritual, emotional, and physical levels. The earliest Biblical reference to worshiping the God of Israel through dance is in the book of Exodus when Miriam, Moses's sister, went out with the women, rejoicing before the Lord because of His deliverance (*English Standard Version [ESV] Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-21). Yet, it is reasonable to believe that they had experience with dance long before, due to the timbrels they had with them when they executed their praise:

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."

There are many other places in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures that record dance as

being an emotional and tangible response to what God was doing in people's lives (Psalms 149:3, 150:4,6; 2 Samuel 6:14-22; Judges 21:21; Matthew 11:17).

Dance unto God has continued throughout the centuries, for not only Jewish people but for others who also acknowledge YHVH as the God of Israel and those who acknowledge Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah (Silberling, 1995). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a movement of young people who came to know Jesus, including many Jews who wanted to maintain their Jewishness as an expression of authentic faith; Messianic congregations began to burst forth (Rudolph, 2016). Within Messianic congregations, the ways they would do this as followers of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, would be to use Hebrew vernaculars, say traditional Jewish liturgical prayers, call themselves Messianic Jews (Jews who believe that Yeshua is the promised Messiah and walk out their faith in the context of a Jewish lifestyle), meet on Shabbat (Saturday), keep the Lord's appointed feast days (Sabbath, Passover, Weeks, Trumpets, Atonement, Booths, and Hanukkah), and celebrate lifecycle milestones such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, and bat mitzvahs (Abramovich, 2009/2011). The expression of worship includes traditional Jewish and Messianic (praise songs with a Jewish flavor) songs, as well as Messianic dance (traditional Jewish and Israeli folk dance steps choreographed to contemporary Messianic music) (Silberling, 1995).

### **Situation to Self**

The philosophical assumption that directed this study was ontological. Creswell and Poth (2018) say that reality is seen through many individual viewpoints with varied perspectives. The researcher is then able to bring together a composite of the phenomenon with everyone's compiled experience. The interpretive framework is social constructivism (p. 24) because as the researcher, I sought to understand the subjective meaning of the participant's view of the

experience. I was able to socially interact with each subject by using broad, open-ended questions (p. 24). It was interpretive research.

The desire to receive a doctorate in Community Care and Counseling with a focus on Traumatology came because of teaching Messianic dance for years through a ministry, Messianic Dance Camps International (MDCI). I wanted to undergird what I do with a professional degree to add a level of expertise and legitimize its viability. While teaching and facilitating thousands of Messianic dance classes over the years, I have witnessed attendees recount how they have felt emotionally and physically better after dancing. There have been many times, after teaching a Messianic dance class, when an attendee would approach and share how they had been suffering a particular trauma and how dancing with others unto the Lord helped them. This is completely understandable because it certainly was the case in my own experience while participating in Messianic dance. At this point, it is important to give the testimony of my journey to give an understanding of my passion to study this topic.

### **My Story**

This dissertation study grew out of my own journey. I grew up in a conservative Jewish family in Southern California. Both parents were born to Eastern European immigrants and were raised in Orthodox Jewish homes. By the time my parents married, they had given up the religious ways of their upbringing and lived more of a secular Jewish lifestyle. Nonetheless, we lived within walking distance of the local, conservative synagogue. For all intents and purposes, our family was secular; however, it was important for them to be affiliated with the Jewish community just the same. My parents would purchase seats for the High Holiday services that I would sometimes attend. As a child, they were repetitive, dull, and not understandable because much of the service was conducted in liturgical Hebrew. Though my parents would speak some



Yiddish and Hebrew around our home when they did not want the children to know what they were talking about, the language at the synagogue was chanted by the cantor; it had to be followed along in the siddur (Jewish prayerbook). Largely, I did not understand a word of what was going on, and yet it was expected to be quiet.

Over the years as I grew, I found that I did not like being Jewish. I looked Jewish by my nose, and I was ashamed as if I had been born with an infirmity. As a child, I had been called “Christ Killer,” “Kike,” and “Dirty Jew.” Sadly, those comments were taken to heart, and I understood that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death.

I had heard the words “Holocaust” and “Hitler” by another Jewish student who was vehemently engaging with the teacher when I was in the fifth grade but did not understand what they meant. I knew my parents were upset by these words as well. We were never to speak the name of Jesus in our home. Somehow His name was equated with the Holocaust, Hitler, pogroms, and the Crusades. He and His religion were not for us, the Jews, because our Messiah was coming. I would inquire, “O.K. If Jesus is not our Messiah, and our Messiah is coming, then when?” No one ever answered.

My mother became sick with cancer when I was eight and died when I was 12. It was a long and arduous illness for her and our family. However, there was a need for me within the family unit, and I had several new responsibilities that increased over time with her illness. There were many doctors, treatments, and appointments, no relief for her, and only repeated dashed hopes. Her illness seemed to affect everyone else differently. I did not feel any emotion when she died.

As a teen and adolescent, I found drugs to fill up the void and shame that I felt inside. Thankfully, I hit a bottom and called out for God to help me. When I was 25, I got sober in

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and loved the fact that it was a spiritual program. It seemed that in part, I was missing something spiritual in my life and I did not have to be Christian or Jewish to attend; I could just pray to God and ask Him to direct my day. I felt He heard my prayers; He loved and accepted me.

When I was 29, I met a man through my brother. We hit it off and got married. He was not Jewish, and his family was affiliated with the Baptist religion. This meant they believed in the Christian God, Jesus. However, he seemed like me because neither of us professed any religious leanings. We found a sanctuary to say our marriage vows in, that had the *Lord's Prayer* written on the steps of the altar which I could relate to being a member of A.A. I did not even have an understanding that the Scripture was in the Bible (*ESV Bible*, 2001, Matthew 6:9-13).

Right after our wedding, my new husband asked me if I wanted to go to church or synagogue in case we have children, that we might raise them in that faith. Though I was not excited to be in the Jewish faith, I knew church meant Jesus. Since I prayed every day and asked God to direct my path, I did what I knew to do. I got down on my knees and asked God to show me if in fact Jesus was the Messiah, because I had been taught he was not and there was a strong possibility that I might have to go to church. Almost immediately, I had an urge to read the Jewish part of the Bible, the Old Testament. I wanted to read what was written against Jesus. What was so bad, that my people could never accept him as the Messiah?

When I opened the first page of the book, I was fascinated, and I could not put the Holy Scriptures down. As I read, I did not see anything against Jesus, but I saw many things that I thought were talking about him, especially Isaiah 53 (*ESV Bible*, 2001). It took a few months, but by the time I finished the entire Old Testament, I believed Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah to the Jewish people. Significantly, that day happened to be the Feast of Trumpets or

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, 1992 when I got down on my knees, asked Jesus to atone for my sins, to come into my heart, and give me a new beginning. My husband was away on a business trip.

At that point, I had not even read the New Testament. I thought I already knew what it said. Jesus was born on Christmas Day, He was resurrected on Easter Day, and the Jews killed him. I was willing to accept that as part of asking Him into my heart and the responsibility of being a follower. However, I called an old friend of the family who used to be Jewish (or so I thought) and had become a born-again Believer several years prior. I wanted her to tell me what I should do now that I was a Christian. I was ready to take the Jewish person off and go to church. She was extremely happy when she found out why I was calling. The question she asked me shook me to the core and changed my life.

“Would you like to come to Rosh Hashanah services with me today?”

“I thought you were a Christian?” I replied.

She said, “I am a Jewish Believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. I attend a congregation where Jews and non-Jews walk out their faith in the context of a Jewish lifestyle.”

I was shocked, “You mean I am still Jewish?” I thought, and then I understood, I could be Jewish and still believe in Jesus.

That first day of being a follower of Jesus, on Rosh Hashanah I walked into a Messianic synagogue. The first person I met was a greeter. She had a necklace on with a *Star of David* pendant.

“Are you Jewish?” I asked.

“No, but I love my Jewish Messiah.” Her response forever changed me. It was as if the

power of God moved through her words and healed the Jewish shame and antisemitic spirit I carried. I walked into the sanctuary a different person.

While attending that first service I noticed several things. First, they did not say the name Jesus, but used His Hebrew name, *Yeshua*. Second, there was very familiar liturgy for the High Holiday, but they used transliterations so the attendees could chant the prayers together. As well, there were translations of the liturgy, so people understood what was being said. Finally, there were beautiful songs that were contemporary and traditional, along with Jewish folk-style type dance. It was a powerful experience, and it made all the traditional Judaism I had been familiar with, come alive in a new way because *Yeshua* was in the center of it all. I left thinking, “Belief in *Yeshua* was the part that was missing in my Jewish life.” I immediately had a burden for my Jewish brethren who did not know their Messiah and a burden for the larger body of Messiah who do not know who Jesus really is.

Being a newlywed at the time, only married 10 months, my husband was disappointed in my newfound faith. I was zealous and I could not reverse what had been done within me. Not only was I excited about *Yeshua*, but I was also excited that I could still be Jewish. Both variables were not mentioned before we married, and now almost immediately they had become part of my life. Though I tried ways to include him, my husband loathed whom I was becoming. He wanted nothing to do with God, the Bible, Christianity, Judaism, and finally me. It became very painful quickly and though we did not have children to contend with, it was still difficult. I found that when I worshiped God through dance with my congregation, my pain lifted, and I was renewed. Each time I danced the fact became more pronounced. I would come in from a very upsetting day in my marriage, I would dance my heart out before the Lord with others in worship to Him, and I would leave different; I would revive and become restored. We stayed married for

almost seven years. Much of that time was spent in turmoil and trying to change to please him without giving up God.

I was very confused regarding submitting to my husband and finally I was able to go to a Christian psychologist. When I arrived in her office, I was broken down emotionally. She saw the light in my persona when I spoke of how I felt when I danced, and she encouraged me to continue. She helped me understand the concept of submitting one to another. In our sixth year, he filed for divorce and again the pain endured was soothed by dance unto the Lord.

Eventually, I remarried a wonderful Messianic Believer from my congregation in another new beginning, and we both danced. He had a young son and we also had two other children. Over 23 years ago our ministry began, and it is thriving. We travel and teach workshops at hosting congregations throughout the world. We also create dance curriculum to teach others how to do Messianic dance.

### **Problem Statement**

More than 20 million people in the United States suffer with varied symptoms of depression (Gallagher et al., 2020). Followers of God are not exempt. According to Harris et al. (2020), out of one thousand pastors who were surveyed about mental illness, 74% personally knew one or more people who had been diagnosed with depression. As well, 23% reported that they personally struggled with depression and mental illness. Yet, 49% never spoke to their congregations about mental illness or depression.

Currently, treatments include medication, brain stimulation, eye movement and desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), art therapy, and talk therapy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2022). Many people feel stigmatized by mental health labels (Eads et al., 2021). Messianic dance may be a viable alternative for relief of self-reported

depression symptoms. It interconnects physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (J. Strength, personal communication, April 15, 2016). There have been research studies separately in these areas that demonstrate relief from symptoms of depression and overall mood betterment.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. In this study, Messianic dance is defined as Israeli and Jewish folkdance steps set to contemporary Messianic worship music (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Silberling, 1995). It is a biblical form of worship to God unlike such activities as yoga or Tai Chi (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Psalms 149:3; 150:4,6; 2 Samuel 6:14-22; Judges 21:21; Matthew 11:17).

Messianic dance touches people physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. By clarifying behavioral remedies and aspects that Messianic dance intersects in its execution, there is an opportunity to propel this activity into a professional realm.

### **Significance of the Study**

It would seem a helpful discovery if an activity such as Messianic dance could help to relieve self-reported symptoms of depression. This would be a natural alternative to traditional medication, brain stimulation, EMDR, and talk therapies which in many ways can affect individuals negatively with stigma due to social labels (Eads et al., 2021). Because there are no studies on Messianic dance, it is important to look at the research contributions in the areas that have been successful in treating self-reported symptoms of depression that Messianic dance touches. Creative art therapies including dance movement, imagination, physical activity, and social interaction are effective (Parsons et al., 2020). This can create a physiological response such as endorphins which can make a person feel better as well as giving the participant a sense

of agency (p. 6). Worshiping God through dance can give the participant a sense of relationship and reflection (Topalian, 2016). Connection with the culture and one's faith is also effective (Perlshtein, 2017; Pirutinsky et al., 2019). As one moves in a bi-lateral way, there is a reprocessing of undigested memories that can free up an individual (Shapiro & Forrest, 2016).

The rationale for this study came from a personal desire to share what Messianic dance did for me when I was experiencing tremendous symptoms of depression as well as hearing testimonies from many other individuals that felt better after they participated in a Messianic dance workshop. The qualitative approach that was taken was phenomenological and included multiple individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of Messianic dance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The subjects were from a messianic dance workshop, and they completed a post-test questionnaire based on well-established measures. Based on their scores, it is possible they had experienced relief from self-reported symptoms of depression or increased mood betterment. They had a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Thus, all the subjects were criterion-based (p. 150). This researcher's experience was bracketed by memoing and journaling to get a fresh perspective from the participants; the study was transcendental (p. 78, 150). The hope was that themes would emerge from their interview transcriptions. In this way, their recounting would add a sphere of professionalism to the study.

### **Research Questions**

According to Heppner et al. (2016), the research questions for the phenomenological study are to provide a pathway to understand the lived experience of the participants (p. 389). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. In a semi-structured interview, there would be constancy across the interview, but there will be ample opportunity to allow the interviewee a full response (p. 374).

The questions were open ended, beginning with a central question and probing questions to follow (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 137). According to Heppner et al. (2016), the central question is experiential.

**Central Question:** How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop?

**Sub-question:** How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being?

There are no studies on Messianic dance and its spiritual implications. However, there are spiritual implications overall in Messianic Judaism, Christianity, and Judaism (Oliver, 2016; Rudolph, 2016; Silberling, 1995).

### Definitions

Even those who are scholarly or strong Believers may not be familiar with some of the vocabulary and meanings. There are some definitions that are unique to this study and activity.

1. *Depression* – This is the most common psychological disorder (Dadfar et al., 2021). It negatively impacts feelings, thinking, and behavior (p. 143). It can cause sadness, a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, loss of physical capabilities, loss of energy, and suicide ideation (p. 143).
2. *Messianic Dance* – Israeli dance steps choreographed to contemporary worship music (Silberling, 1995). This also includes traditional Jewish folk dances with lyrics that focus on God, the land of Israel, and the people.
3. *Messianic Judaism* – Jewish believers in Jesus who walk out their faith in the context of a Jewish lifestyle (Abramovich, 2009/2011). This includes keeping all the appointed biblical days as outlined in mainstream Judaism.



4. *Wellbeing* – This refers to mood, vitality, self-efficacy, coping, body image, and anxiety levels (Milman et al., 2020). This could also include self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, being the master of one's environment, autonomy, and good relationships with others (Dadfar et al., 2021, p. 143).
5. *Yeshua* – The Hebrew transliterated name for Jesus. It means salvation (Rudolph, 2016).

### Summary

Messianic dance is a biblical form of worship first mentioned in the Book of Exodus and executed by Miriam the Prophetess and the other women who were praising God for His deliverance (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-21). As well, dance is mentioned throughout the Scriptures demonstrating that the people of God responded to Him with their whole being in exultation (Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 149; Psalm 150). Even Yeshua alluded to the fact that followers could express themselves through dance (Matthew 11:17).

Israeli and Jewish folk dance passed down through the centuries and was part of a communal experience helping people to connect with their Jewish identity (Gollance, 2019; Perlshtein, 2017). It was not until the late sixties and early seventies that the modern Messianic Jewish movement began, where Messianic dance became an expression of worship within the congregations (Abramovich, 2009/2011; Rudolph, 2016; Silberling, 1995). Many people have stated that Messianic dance has made them feel better from self-reported feelings of depression (MDCI, 2022).

This researcher's own story was the catalyst for wanting to study this topic. Currently, over 20 million people in the United States have symptoms of depression in varied degrees (USDHHS, 2022) with mostly medication and different talk therapies as the normative prescribed remedies (USDHHS, 2022). Unfortunately, sometimes these can cause stigmas (Eads

et al., 2021). Messianic dance may be a viable alternative for relief of self-reported depression symptoms. It interconnects physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (J. Strength, personal communication, April 15, 2016). There is a gap in the literature and there have been no studies on this topic yet.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to explore, evaluate, and fuse together literature to: (a) build a foundation where there has not been one, (b) help solidify the research questions, (c) direct this research study, (d) give definitions, (e) bring to light how dance, worship of God, and feeling better from self-reported symptoms of depression can intersect, and (f) grow an understanding of qualitative phenomenology. Currently, there are no studies on Messianic dance or whether or not those who participate in Messianic dance have relief from symptoms of depression, experience healing, or have more joy. To be more exact, related research on this topic is scant and mostly non-existent. However, there is some related research on dance and its successful use.

Messianic dance is Israeli dance steps choreographed to Messianic worship music; the focus of this music genre is the worship of Jesus in a Jewish style (Abramovich, 2009/2011; Silberling, 1995). There is a biblical worldview because the nature of Messianic dance has a scriptural foundation. The Bible says to worship God with all of one's might (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Deut. 6:5; Luke 10:27), praise Him in the dance, and everything that has breath praise the Lord (Psalms 149:3, 150:4,6).

The conceptual framework which informs this study includes Carl Jung, whom Fourie and Lessing (2010) noted, that in his theory, dance movement is valuable because it releases the subconscious mind. As well, Marion Chace, one of the original dance movement therapists, held that dance engaged clients and connected people to others (Robyn, 2018).

The literature review includes several foundations that the subject touches on. Primary inclusionary topics were found including Judaism, Christianity, Messianic Judaism, Messianic

dance, Christian praise dance, depression, dance movement therapy (DMT), exercise, Jewish culture, and religion. The summary will illuminate the problem and inform on what research has already been explored, identify gaps in the literature, as well as make a case for the need for research on this topic.

### **Theoretical Background**

People have stated that participating in this form of worship is not only exhilarating and fun but has been a source of healing from emotional as well as physical ailments (MDCI, 2022). Messianic dance has many combined components in a natural state that help people with symptoms of depression. Behavioral specialists use several techniques while working with clients. A psychology professor at Fuller University weighed in. She expressed, since research has demonstrated that depression affects the individual physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually, Messianic dance can have a positive effect on symptoms of depression because it interconnects all four of those areas (J. Strength, personal communication, April 15, 2016). On a physical level, the neurochemistry of the brain is out of balance when a person is depressed, affecting the person's mood and energy level. Physical activity produces endorphins and can help the suffering person's emotions. Messianic dance is a way to provide moderate activity. Engaging with another person in a positive and meaningful way can prove to be very helpful in reducing symptoms of depression.

### **Depression**

According to the USDHHS (2022), many people suffer with symptoms of depression. Currently, over 20 million people in the United States have symptoms of depression in varied degrees (Gallagher et al., 2020). These may include sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, weight changes, sleep problems, loss of energy, feelings of

worthlessness, suicide ideation, and completed suicide. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) (n.d.) gives criteria for recognizing major depressive disorders. (1) There must be five of the following present for more than two weeks: feeling depressed or loss of interest, significant weight loss or weight gain, loss of appetite or extreme appetite, cannot sleep or too much sleep every day, extreme restlessness or slowness observed by others, fatigue, inability to concentrate or indecisiveness, reoccurring thoughts of death or suicide ideation, or suicide attempt or plan. (2) The symptoms cause impairment on a social or occupational level. (3) The behavior is not attributed to any physical condition or medication interaction. (4) The episode is not explained by another psychotic condition. (5) There has not been a manic or hypomanic episode.

Unfortunately, there is high mortality because of completed suicides. Over 700,000 people die from completed suicides each year (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). More than 75% of people who suffer from depression do not receive treatment. This has to do with low income, social stigma, and lack of providers (WHO, 2021). According to the DSM-5 Library (n.d.), depression could be caused by childhood trauma, sexual trauma, low income, racism, and discrimination. As well, depression can be caused by other variables including brain chemistry, genetics, stressful life events, medical illnesses, medication, alcohol, and certain personality types (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Ethnologically speaking, women are more susceptible to depression than men. They also are at more risk depending on their childbearing stages of life. Symptoms may include social isolation, crying, loneliness, anger, and pain.

The WHO says that depression is of global concern (Kella et al., 2021). Approximately 280 million people worldwide suffer from depression (WHO, 2021). Because of its nature, it is likely to reoccur. Brush et al. (2020) say, even with evidenced-based treatment remission is low

and reoccurrence is as high as 54% (p. 893). People who experience it usually have difficulty functioning with everyday activities (Kella et al., 2021). Other characteristics of depression may include problems in relationships, substance abuse, physical illness, problems at work, financial problems, poor mentalization of oneself and others, deterioration of the body, and lack of creativity (p. 6). It is the most common form of a psychological disorder (Dadfar et al., 2021). It is important to keep in mind, the same can be said of Christians with depression. There is no difference statistically. Out of one thousand pastors who were surveyed about mental illness, 74% personally knew one or more people who had been diagnosed with depression. As well, 23% reported that they personally struggled with depression and mental illness. Yet, 49% never spoke to their congregations about mental illness or depression (Harris et al., 2020).

Most recently, due to the world-wide pandemic of COVID-19, depression has increased exponentially. In a quantitative study of depression for those who have been in a lockdown in Greece, it was found 9.3% had depression and 23.31% were having relapses; 8.5% had severe distress, and increased anxiety was in 45% of the sample (Fountoulakis et al., 2021). De Sousa et al. (2021) agrees that the quarantine period had a detrimental effect of individuals' mental health causing some to develop or increase depression and other mental health disorders (p. 1326). Even with anti-depressants, they have been shown to sometimes have residual symptoms of cognitive impairment that affects concentration and decision making (Brush et al., 2020). One study showed that 70% of 448 participants on a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor treatment (SSRI) got relief from depression but experienced these cognitive symptoms (p. 894). There needs to be options for treatment including those that are not pharmacologically based.

### ***Physiology of Depression***

Physiologically speaking, what goes on within the brain and depression are not

conclusive (Zhang et al., 2018). However, neuroimaging has shown some things within the grey matter, white matter, and receptivity (p. 995). Abnormalities in the depressed patients were seen in several areas of the brain. If there is damage to the neuro pathways there is dysfunction (p. 997). The prefrontal-subcortical circuit controls emotional and cognitive processing (p. 997). The dorsolateral prefrontal circuit handles reward anticipation (p. 997). When the anterior cingulate frontal circuit misfires it makes the person unable to feel pleasure (p. 998). Fink et al. (2021) say the hippocampus, across the board, is approximately five percent smaller in people who are depressed. It is also thought to affect the reward-processing center of the brain (Brush et al., 2020, p. 893).

### ***Depression Measures***

There are some reliable self-reporting measures for depression. According to Olino et al. (2012), the two most reliable scales are the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies – Depression Scale (CES-D). The BDI is a 21-item self-reporting questionnaire that measures depression characteristics and attitudes; it only takes 10 minutes to complete. The CES-D is a 20-item measure that asks questions about the past week in the person's life regarding depression symptoms. The BDI appears to be stronger at identifying depression at higher severity levels, whereas the CES-D identifies lower severity (p. 76). Ottaviani (2018) says that dwelling on negative thoughts or rumination is a valid sign of depression and can lead to increased heart rate (p. 3).

### ***Treatments***

Depression treatments can include medication and talk therapies (USDHHS, 2022). However, current treatments in the Western nations for clinical depression include self-help, counseling, alternative medicine, medication, EMDR, and brain stimulation therapy.

**Self-help.** Many people will take a self-help approach to alleviate their symptoms of depression. Unfortunately, there are stigmas for some people to be labeled with mental health disorders, and non-clinical measures are desired (Eads et al., 2021). These can include exercise, sleep schedule, diet, and spending time with people (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Other people may postpone major life decisions and avoid alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, and overeating (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], n.d.). Unfortunately, sometimes depressed people can add to their own problems by their behavior. Steger and Kashdan (2009) said individuals that are depressed have a hard time with social interaction and have less of a sense of belonging. People that are depressed can induce a negative effect in others which then causes rejection (p. 2).

**Counseling.** Talking therapy is known as counseling; a client talks with a mental health professional long or short term. The counselor helps the client develop coping skills (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022a) there are five types of talk therapies. Psychoanalysis focuses on the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist to change behavior by discovering the unconscious meanings. Behavioral therapy focuses on learning behaviors. It includes classic conditioning, exposure desensitization, and rewards. It can focus on thoughts and behaviors when the cognitive aspect is added (APA, 2022b).

Cognitive therapy looks at what people think about things (APA, 2022, para. 3). Humanistic therapy looks at the client's ability to make rational decisions and is concerned about the welfare of others (para. 4). Finally, the integrative approach may use a combination of several by tailoring the counseling to the client (para. 5).

**Medication.** Some people are prescribed medications for depression. According to the Cleveland Clinic (2022), antidepressants change the chemistry of the brain that cause depression.



They balance the levels of neurotransmitters that can cause the depression (para. 3). Higher levels of dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine usually means lower depression (para. 3). They usually take two weeks to begin working and there may be side effects to the medication (para. 3). Effectiveness varies from patient to patient.

**Brain Stimulation Therapy.** This type of therapy is usually for severe depression or psychosis (Cleveland Clinic, 2022, para. 17). It includes electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) which delivers a mild electric current to produce a brief seizure. It is used when medications are not working or if the client is shut down. Another type is transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). It works along with medication and delivers a magnetic current under the skull to help regulate emotions (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). One other type is called vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) and is known as the “pacemaker for the brain” (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). This device is implanted to stimulate the vagus nerve in the neck. It continually sends mild impulses to change the way the brain works (para. 1).

**Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.** Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) of traumatic memories can also be used as a treatment. According to Shapiro and Forrest (2016), EMDR sets forth bilateral movement while simultaneously concentrating on a part of a disturbing memory (p. 7). EMDR is therapy developed by Shapiro (p. 639) used to treat traumatic events in both adults and children. Its effects are rapid; there is a low dropout rate and is considered more effective than cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (p. 639). Bilateral movements may increase brain function, processing of sensory input, facilitate an awareness of emotions, create brain plasticity, and feelings of dysregulation.

This type of therapy has been found to help clients digest what has happened to them. Ultimately, it allows the client to experience love, joy, connection with others, and feel good

about themselves. According to Wood et al. (2018), EMDR is usually done in eight stages. These include the history of the client and treatment planning, preparation, trauma assessment, desensitization, installation, scanning the body, closure, and re-evaluation (p. 68). Their study showed that because of the bi-lateral movement, EMDR was positively correlated with a decrease in depression symptoms. One study conducted of sexually assaulted women, showed that within three treatments using EMDR, whether in a group or private session, subjects had remission of trauma related pain (Allon, 2015). In another study, researchers used the physical activities of running and ladder-work as a form of EMDR (Draper et al., 2020). They found that traumatized youth fared well in several running sessions based on EMDR principles. People have had relief from trauma and depression when participating in Messianic dance. They will often share what they have experienced. Because Messianic dance uses choreography of steps that shifts body weight back and forth in bilateral movement, it seems that it could be a type of EMDR.

**Alternative Medicine.** This type of treatment is for mild depression. It includes massage, acupuncture, hypnosis, biofeedback, art therapies, tai chi, meditation, and could be used with other therapies known as complementary therapy (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Messianic dance could fit into this genre.

**Regarding Messianic Dance.** While psychotherapy provides a space for a person to talk and be heard on an individual level, group interaction is also helpful. Messianic dance is a group social activity. On a spiritual level depression can sometimes result from a spiritual attack or battle whether known or not to the depressed person. Dealing with a spiritual attack from a scriptural perspective involves prayer, worship, and praising God. Messianic dance is not just dancing in a community, but the purpose is to engage in prayer by worshiping Yahweh and

praising his name (MDCI, 2022).

Amazingly, up until now there has not been any inquiry into the effectiveness of Messianic dance relative to symptoms of depression and overall betterment of mood. However, Messianic dance crosses several different social ideas that bring individuals together. Messianic dance is a group social activity and group interaction is helpful when dealing with symptoms of depression (J. Strength, personal communication, April 15, 2016). Jewish, Israeli, and Messianic dance are culturally Jewish (Gollance, 2019). Dance helps people walk out their Jewish and Messianic Jewish identity (Perlshtein, 2017). Feeling culturally in tune helps people have better moods (Fulmer et al., 2010). Attachment to the God of Israel is healing (Pirutinsky et al., 2019; Wilder et al., 2020). The traditional folk-dance steps when danced brought people healing (Rottenberg, 2017). Frequent attendance at religious gatherings predicts better mental health (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020).

**Dance Movement Therapy.** Dance movement therapy (DMT) is also social and is very effective for people with depression (Millman et al., 2021). It decreases anxiety and increases quality of life, interpersonal skills, and cognitive processing (Koch, et al., 2019). Doing activities that are synchronous, including dance and exercise, are effective in releasing endorphins and causes social bonding (Tarr et al., 2015).

### **Sociological Foundations**

According to Taylor et al. (2020), feeling connected to other people is a basic human need that enhances life satisfaction, mitigates the effects of stress, and creates a stronger immunity (p 788). Social disconnection can lead to obesity, smoking, and early mortality (p. 788). Messianic dance is not only a spiritual activity, but it is a social and relational one. It connects people to one another within the Messianic Jewish religion and people seem to leave

the workshop feeling better than when they arrived (Silberling, 1995). The golden rule for the Believer in the God of Israel is not only to love God with all his heart, but also to love his neighbor as himself. Jesus also said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 10:27; Matthew 18:20).

One study found that participating in positive activities as an intervention for depression enhanced social connectedness (Taylor et al., 2020). The activities increased positive emotions and decreased negative ones (p. 788). This is important because even with remission in depression with current treatments such as CBT, there was still low improvement in social functioning (p. 789).

Psychological well-being seems to be the opposite of depression and a lack of joy. According to Dadfar et al. (2021), this refers to self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, life purpose, mastery, and positive relationships with others (p. 143). Coursey (2021) says one of the keys to having joy is a connection with others, or the need for relationships. Messianic dance is one way that people interact with one another. Novak and Ellis (2021/2022) say that classes in group settings have many benefits. They can cause attendees to make friends and acquaintances, increase adherence, increase motivation, and enjoyment (p. 534). As well, there are opportunities for connecting with others who share similar faith beliefs (p. 534).

In a qualitative review on religiosity (Kucharska, 2018), it was found that overall affiliation with a particular religion in being of service, attendance, and prayer are associated with lower levels of mental disorders (p. 41). Also, there may be a positive benefit health factor from one’s affiliation with a religious community (p. 42). It seems it would be a worthy endeavor to see if participating in Messianic dance creates a feeling of well-being. Drawing on Fulmer et al. (2010), Kucharska ascribed the theory of person-culture-match to subjects who had better

positive feelings of self-esteem and well-being when participating with others within their cultural community.

### **Theoretical Concepts**

Messianic dance is a God driven religious encounter, and religion is an important concept for mental health (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Eilami et al., 2019; Ettun et al., 2014). Physical movement has a positive effect on well-being (Killingback et al., 2022; Lubans et al., 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2018) and Messianic dance uses physical movement. The theory of EMDR is important because Messianic dance uses bi-lateral movement within its choreography (Shapiro & Forrest, 2016).

There are several theoretical concepts of this dissertation. First, there is the Biblical concept; there are Biblical examples of worshiping God through dance. These include Miriam the Prophetess, King David, The Psalms, Biblical festival sacrifice, and Jesus (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-21; Leviticus 23; Psalms 149:3; 150:4; 150:6; 2 Samuel 6:14-22; Judges 21:21; Matthew 11:17). When a person participates in Messianic dance, the focus is on God, and He becomes the focus of attention and adoration.

Bowlby's attachment theory is a theoretical concept related to human protection with a care-giver's physical nearness (Granqvist, 2021). For Jews and Christians who attach themselves to the God of the Bible, it has been shown to bring better mental health (Pirutinsky et al., 2019). This solidifies what Thomas (2005) said in his writing: "People were created by God to enjoy secure, intimate attachment to parents, loved ones and to God Himself, and to others. Every person is hardwired by the Creator to seek and maintain intimate, personal relationships" (p. 1).

Messianic dance allows the participant to fully attach themselves to Father God by focusing and reaching up to Him. Messianic dance is a God driven religious encounter, and

religion is an important concept for mental health (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Eilami, et al., 2019; Ettun et al., 2014). Physical movement has a positive effect on well-being (Killingback et al., 2022; Lubans et al., 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2018) and Messianic dance uses physical movement. The theory of EMDR is important because Messianic dance uses bi-lateral movement within its choreography (Shapiro & Forrest, 2016).

### **Theoretical Summary**

It was found that physical activity is related to happiness and mood betterment (Killingback et al., 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2019). Bi-lateral movements within therapies like EMDR help to unlock trauma stuck within a person (Shapiro & Forrest, 2016). In a study, emotional wellbeing was influenced by cycling and dancing (Campion & Levita, 2014). Studies on social interactions have been effective in decreasing symptoms of depression (Kuchaska, 2018; Mogan et al., 2017; Tarr et al., 2015). Having religion and faith has also shown to be effective with depression symptoms (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Granqvist, 2021; Kuchaska, 2018; Pirutinsky et al., 2019; Topalian, 2016; Wilder et al., 2020). However, there appears to be no research or qualitative studies on Messianic dance or if it would bring relief from self-reported symptoms of depression. The aim of this phenomenological study is to explore this aspect of relief from symptoms of depression and increase overall mood betterment through participation in Messianic dance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Creswell et al. (2007), the researcher should begin with assumptions. It is understood that the bracketed values would be known in the study. To conduct the study and solidify the research question a constructionism paradigm was employed. Heppner et al. (2016) says that experiences of people are shaped by their culture, environment, and societal ties (p. 8).

One person's reality is not the same as another person's and can be interpreted not solely by a particular event, but by interactions; these interactions include environment, thoughts, interpretations of the researcher, and the connection between the subject and the researcher (p. 9). Through back-and-forth dialectics between the participant and the researcher, interpretation of the data was discovered, and then the analysis confirmed by the participant (p. 9). Because the research question was about the essence of what was experienced, the design was phenomenological (Creswell et al., 2007).

As a bracketing disclosure, when this researcher began to follow the Jewish Jesus, there was a great deal of emotional difficulty in her life on various levels including interpersonally, emotionally, and spiritually. The congregation she became a part of offered a type of worship folk dance which she participated in on a weekly basis. She noticed that she felt better on all levels each time she participated in the class. Even now, on the three-year precipice of COVID-19, Messianic dance is a restorative act of worship to God and helps to keep symptoms of depression away.

Dance is healing. Carl Jung noted that dance movement released the unconscious mind (Fourie & Lessing, 2010). This is also known as the transient function, psychological growth through the subconscious mind (Hancock, 2021) and dance can activate the two functions (p. 157). He felt the transient function needed to be activated for a person who has a complex of some kind, to have healing take place (p. 158). He felt it was a way a person could change attitudes and see life differently (p. 158). However, he did not have a recipe for such (p. 160). He felt that participating in a creative activity evoked a liberation (p. 161).

Many have found dance to be that conceptual construct. As such, Marion Chace, one of the early DMTs used dance movement to combine cognitions and emotion which in turn helped

to create self-awareness within the client (Robyn, 2018). The basic idea is that the body has multiple systems that affect each other. The brain and the body are interrelated. The body will express emotional concerns even if they are hidden memories through the movement and in the presence of the one listening. According to Chace, the therapist is the participant observer, and the potential for change is called energy transformation that happens within a secure relationship. Chace felt DMT is a reciprocal activity that requires trust. Also, she felt people have a need to be in community to be seen, heard, and understood (Chaiklin, 2017, pp. 144-145).

Because of the depth of the experience with rhythmic body movement, phenomenological studies are admirable and attest to what the participants experience (Robyn, 2018). This concept has advanced the literature because there are studies that show dance and DMT help people with depression, alleviating symptoms and increasing joy (Kella et al., 2021; Kronsted, 2020).

Religion and spirituality also help people with depression and trauma (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Pirutinsky et al., 2019). Christian praise dance has been shown to be effective for better psychological wellbeing (Chung et al., 2016). Israeli dance has shown to help heal trauma from the Holocaust (Rottenberg, 2017). This current research relates to these concepts because Messianic dance is thought to be healing (Rottenberg, 2017). Messianic dance is culturally Jewish (Lebaka, 2014), and Messianic dance is a form of worship to God.

### **Related Literature**

The literature presented intersects one another. Messianic dance is a form of worship to God. The act of Messianic dance is executed by responding to praise music with Israeli style folk dance steps. Some dances are fast and include clapping of the hands or snapping of the fingers. Some dances are slow in tempo, contemplative, meditative and are a vehicle for prayer. It is Jewish in appearance, yet Jesus is the object of worship. It is a spiritual based activity and



transformative. It is inclusive of Messianic Judaism, Jewish cultural aspects, Christianity, psychological well-being, DMT, praise dance, exercise, and religious faith.

### **Messianic Judaism**

Like the first century Jewish Believers who followed Jesus, Messianic Judaism is a movement of modern-day Jews and Gentiles who also follow Jesus and live in a context of a Jewish lifestyle (Rudolph, 2016). They are known as Messianic Believers (Rudolph, 2016). Many Jews of this modern movement came to faith in Jesus in the 1970s (Ariel, 2016) yet they have been around for a century. They follow the Scriptures in a way, as to do what Jesus did when he lived (Oliver, 2016). Abramovich (2009/2011) would call it kind of a hybrid of Judaism and Christianity. In his phenomenological case study (Abramovich, 2009/2011), the author looked at Celebrate Messiah Messianic Community Australia. The study gave a good explanation of what Messianic Judaism is and its practices.

It also defined the challenges. Messianic Judaism has not been accepted by other Jews. Those Believers who are affiliated with Messianic congregations, follow the biblical holidays in various degrees, and many of the other laws of purity as outlined in the Torah (Oliver, 2016). They are not unlike the different branches of modern-day Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist) and the diversity between the groups (Abramovich, 2009/2011). The dividing line which comes between Messianic and the other types of Judaism is belief in Jesus as the Messiah (which to them is heretical and abhorrent). The other types of Judaism do not accept and would thus classify Messianic Believers as Christians. Messianic Jews on the other hand, do not accept this. They believe they are still Jewish (Abramovich, 2009/2011). Therefore, the Messianic branch is not readily accepted as a sect of Judaism (Abramovich, 2009/2011). However, that topic, though interesting, is beyond the scope of this paper and will be

saved for another time.

### ***Messianic Dance and its Biblical Foundations***

The act of Messianic dance is executed by responding to praise music with Israeli style folk dance steps. There is usually a group of at least three people who dance together, often holding hands in a circular formation (Silberling, 1995). The dances are choreographed and synchronized so that each participant is doing the same steps as the other participants. Because, while dancing, the focus should be on the Lord, this type of movement exemplifies the Scripture: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Yeshua verifies the same Scripture and then adds to it “And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 27:10).

**Mechanics of a Messianic Dance Class.** Workshops begin with an opening prayer and dances taught are related to relevant Scripture selections. Some dances are fast and include clapping of the hands or snapping of the fingers. Some dances are slow in tempo, contemplative, meditative, and are a vehicle for prayer. In a three-hour workshop, there are two sessions with breaks that allow the attendees to fellowship with one another and enjoy refreshments.

**Dance in Scripture.** Messianic dance has been practiced since the time of Moses and likely before, when the women went out with timbrels to rejoice the great deliverance they had experienced from Egypt (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-21). To them, this was a responsive expression of joy and thanksgiving to the God of Israel, knowing that He would receive their dance as a sacrifice of praise. As well, King David communed and rejoiced before God with dance as a visceral response to what the Lord had done by bringing the Ark of the

Covenant back into the house of God (2 Samuel 6:14-22). Dance is mentioned throughout the Scriptures. The Psalms declare the commandment to dance (Psalms 149, 150).

Dance was a part of life cycle and harvest events, such as when the men from the tribe of Benjamin went out to Shiloh to select brides from the girls who were dancing in the fields (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Judges 21:21), Jesus spoke of the dance in his parables (Matthew 11:17).

Messianic dance is also seen to elevate emotions when depressed. The psalmist declared, “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Psalm 30:11-12).

**Holiness through Dance.** Messianic dance affords the participant the opportunity of elevated holiness in service within body and mind.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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. (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Romans 12:1-2)

The Greek word for “worship” is *latreuo*. It has a dual meaning. It also means service. This is not an anomaly because the Old Testament has the similar word *avodah* which is interchangeable. It means an acceptable form of work, worship, and service to God. The children of Israel wanted to go from the pharaoh’s presence to worship the Lord: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go into Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me’” (Exodus 8:1).

Hayford (2011) says when God’s people come together, they are a dwelling place for His

presence (para. 3). He says four things happen when people worship. First, the Scriptures come alive. Second, His kingdom becomes established. Third, people are healed, and finally, the worship makes Hell flee (para. 3). It involves the entire person including physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual (para. 7).

Hayford (2014) also says, that when one worships God, it makes room for Him to move in a powerful way that cannot be done by a person's own ability (para. 1). Holiness is a trait of God that means completeness. As Believers, we ascribe to a holy priesthood (para. 8) and in worship to Him, He transforms His creation like a mirror from glory to glory (para. 9).

It also requires the participant to acknowledge that this activity is not the same as a secular exercise or other types of worldly spiritual movement such as Yoga or Tai Chi. In Psalm 24:3-4, it says,

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (*ESV Bible*, 2001)

### **Christian Praise Dance**

Messianic dance incorporates worship of God while dancing. The theoretical underpinning of spirituality within dance is not an anomaly. Because Messianic dance is worship unto Jesus, it is important to include Christian praise dance within the literature. Though there are few scholarly works about Christian dance, the Shakers of the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries said, "Dancing is the gift of God to the church. In this exercise we receive strength and consolation" (Topalian, 2016, p. 85).

Topalian (2016) found in her experience, though she was a Christian, she had lost her

trajectory, and dancing unto God was her way back to Him. A weekend of spiritual dance and contemplative prayer had reawakened her. Some of the themes that emerged through the retreat included connection with God, self, and others. Interestingly, the weekend of dance brought all of the attendees into a painful place emotionally as they danced. It was as if the dance allowed them to look at their pain. One concludes, all of them experienced freedom and joy, a sense of dancing with God, positive outcomes, memories of a significant God experience, symbolic experience emerging as a gift, and a new sense of self-expression (p. 88).

Chung et al. (2016) did a pre-test and post-test study with 250 subjects using the WHO Quality of Life Questionnaire. The findings showed significant improvement in the psychological well-being of the participants, regardless of their religious background. Some Believers felt they were being obedient to the Scriptures and walking out the Bible through their dance. In an ethnographic study of Christian praise dancers, Elisha (2017) found that the dancers likened what they were doing to the Levitical priesthood of the Bible. While participating in a secular venue, they chose not to consider what they were doing as a performance. Instead, they used the event to minister and glorify God. Their experience brings relevance to this Scripture “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, 1 Peter 2:9).

Zaluchu (2021) says that worship dance is not only biblical and doctrinally sound, but that this type of movement is an actual language unto God (p. 1). Only if there is a connection between body, spirit, and mind in worship is a true spiritual experience created (p. 1). It is through this type of worship that awareness of God, and His presence are experienced. Further, it is reciprocal. In Zephaniah 3:17 God rejoices over His people. The root of the Hebrew word for

rejoice means to spin or circle around (Silberling, 1995). Thus, the Lord dances over His people.

### **Dance Movement Therapy**

There is nothing mystical about dance and movement to feel better. According to Levine and Land (2016) dance movement therapy (DMT) has been around for over 75 years. As such, Marion Chace, one of the early DMTs, used dance movement to combine cognitions and emotion which in turn helped to create self-awareness within the client (Robyn, 2018).

Neurobiology suggests that movement is beneficial in treating people with trauma (Levine & Land, 2016). It is thought to help those with all kinds of psychological pain and processing of the event. Kronsted (2020) says that people gain a better understanding of themselves when they do narrative dance.

Even topics of mood and feelings are important as how viewing movement can facilitate change. One study showed how it improved the mood of audience participants. Reason (2017) did a qualitative study of a dance presentation of war that was viewed by an audience. It was performed for war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who were grappling with aftereffects. Several people in the audience were interviewed following the performance. The themes that emerged were the authenticity of what war was like for them and the process of rehabilitation depicted by a performer who played an amputee.

The DMT helps people feel better from the inside out. Many people with trauma have been victimized and abused. In a study, the clinician found that DMT helps the client feel safe and heal from the inside (interoception) through recovery from PTSD (Dieterich-Hartwell, 2017). Dance can be transformative for participants. In a study using DMT for people with trauma by Levine and Land (2016), four themes emerged. They included awareness of mind and body, empowerment of reclaiming one's body, building of healthy relationships, and a healthy

expression of movement via DMT.

When people have experienced healing through movement a personal narrative is paramount. Forcier (2020) chronicled her own recovery via DMT. She found agency, made meaning of the trauma event, and it was for her betterment. Brauninger (2012) found that in a mixed methods study, DMT had positive short- and long-term effects on participants. It changed their attitude toward life as well as improved physical benefits. There were also positive implications in the areas of group sharing and cohesion, daily life struggles, creating, transcending, finding meaning, and spirituality.

In another qualitative narrative (Hancock, 2021), a woman who had a terrible and traumatic birth of her baby, found healing in the dance. She had to have the baby by cesarian birth, and the doctor realized halfway through the operation that she could feel everything. Afterward, she felt victimized, was disinterested in life, and was unable to care for her baby. All her feelings were blocked. She was given a gift of a spiritual dance retreat and in one three-hour class, everything changed. There were five parts that included trusting the feet and moving the body, leaving perceptions and creating boundaries, letting the music move the person until change occurs, lyrical movement is like being on the other side of an extremely satisfying event, and finally, rest and wholeness (p. 161).

For those who are Christians, Wilder et al. (2020), said that associations with music and rhythm may provide a deep way for Believers to process and convey emotions they are unable to verbalize. It may also calm those who are upset just as David played the harp to soothe King Saul who was clearly agitated, and then calmed down (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, 1 Samuel 16:23).

Different styles of dance are also effective in increasing the well-being of those who have experienced trauma. One study investigated how Flamenco dance therapy affects trauma

survivors (Koch et al., 2019). The study showed that even after one class there was an increase in well-being. Acolin (2016) felt the field of DMT should have an overriding theory such as Barsalou's social embodiment theory. She conducted a study using a modified grounded method to gain clarity about the mind-body connection. She believes the body, mind, and spirit are connected.

Dance has an uplifting trend to it. Gordon (2014) did a qualitative study on how facilitators use positive affect and DMT together. Gordon's emerging themes included therapeutic interventions, goals, client attributes, and therapist attributes. Finally, there is a connection between dance and spirituality. Bajekal (2021) bridged the gap between DMT and mindfulness. Through both practices, the client can use their cultural dance to move from their hard experience to a place of acceptance and self-awareness.

In a meta-analysis of 817 studies using qualitative data, seven of the studies were included. The data found there was a decrease in depression scores directly correlated favorably with DMT. As well, the same scores appeared three months following the studies (Karkou et al., 2019). Their conclusion was that DMT was an effective intervention for depression.

### **Religious Studies for Trauma and Mental Health**

One of the most compelling aspects of Messianic dance is its aspect of spirituality. The fact is that it is rooted in the Bible and the dance is about praising Jesus. Some feel that they are dancing before Him (Silberling, 1995).

### ***Prayers, Meditation, and Mindfulness***

Messianic dance is a type of prayer, meditation, and mindfulness. These can be a help for those who are emotionally suffering. Bell (2015) conducted a study on African American college students living in an urban area. It was found that meditation practices helped to produce



mindfulness, lessened anxiety and depression symptoms, lowered blood pressure, and lowered heart rate. Religion can have a protective factor for those with PTSD. Kucharska (2018) found that negative PTSD cognitions were stronger among nonreligious people.

It is common for people to feel transformed after praising the Lord in the dance even at a religious gathering. Topalian (2016) discovered that when attendees participated in spiritual dance, they experienced freedom and joy, a new sense of direction, a deeper connection with others, and a stronger relationship with God. Bosco-Ruggiero (2020) did a quantitative study using the General Social Survey to look at the relationship of spirituality and mental health. It was found that attending religious gatherings predicted greater mental health.

Messianic dance employs prayers, meditation, and mindfulness. Eilami et al. (2019) did a controlled clinical trial. The study emphasized the importance of prayers in cancer patients and their pain. The results showed that a regular spirituality workshop increased the patient's life expectancy and health. Another study looked at the Muslim population (Ijaz et al., 2017). It compared those who offer prayer and mindfulness to those who only pray. It was found that those who use both have better mental health.

Each year trauma affects almost three million people in the United States (Meneses et al., 2021). Prayer and meditation can be a potent triage even when terrible trauma happens. In a quantitative study by Jang et al. (2018), it was found that those who prayed less after the Nepal earthquake had more symptoms. These included somatic, depression, withdrawal, anxiety, social immaturity, and internalizing problems. In another analysis of prayer, LaBarbera and Hetzel (2016) used a mixed methods study to find that participants who prayed frequently reported greater satisfaction with their job. The only limitation was that the participants were Christian. Heath and Cutrer-Párraga (2020) conducted research on how religion and spirituality affect

people who have experienced extreme trauma. For many people religion and spirituality are core components of their being.

In a qualitative study, Starnino (2016) found that participants who drew upon prayer, meditation, and spirituality were able to better cope with trauma. Also, spirituality can help people with psychiatric disability cope.

A Messianic dance class may draw people from 8 to 80 years of age. There is a strong sense of prayer, meditation on the Lord, and mindfulness within the dance community. One study (Lifshitz et al., 2019) on aging and spirituality, found that as people age, spirituality becomes more important in certain domains. The most important domains are personal and communal. Personal spirituality is how one relates to self-meaning, value in life, purpose, self-worth, and identity (p. 984). Communal spirituality is expressed in love, hope, trust, forgiveness, and faith in fellow men (p. 985). It is interpersonal relationships between self and others that focus on morality, culture, and religion (p. 985).

### ***Religion***

Kuchaska (2018) found in a systematic review of quantitative studies on religiosity and psychological outcomes of trauma, that overall, there are positive associations (p. 41). However, limitations include if the subject is male or female, the type of trauma sustained, and previous religious leanings. Religion may also offer a way to cope with stressful events and make meaning out of them. The evidence reviewed showed that religious practices were positively related to better psychological outcomes and function (p. 52). Many times, after teaching a Messianic dance class, an attendee will approach and share how they have been suffering a particular trauma and the dance helped them. Starnino (2016) studied trauma survivors with psychiatric disabilities and spirituality through a qualitative case study. The results showed that

after the client worked through the trauma with spirituality, themes emerged including spiritual coping, meaning-making, and propensity to recovery (p. 378).

Bosco-Ruggiero (2020) found that more frequent religious encounters were related to better mental health and well-being. The study also encouraged mental health providers to encourage their clients to lean on spiritual beliefs in times of stress and for those who are not spiritual to explore spiritual possibilities (p. 46). Some people who participate in Messianic dance have physical ailments. In a study on the importance of prayer for mental health in cancer patients, Eilami et al. (2019) found, that 3 one-in-a-half-hour spirituality workshops not only decreased anxiety in the patients, but their life expectancy was increased.

According to a survey of 258 psychologists (Heath & Cutrer-Párraga, 2020), 82% felt spirituality and religion were positively related to the mental health of their clients. Messianic dance is offered with a prayer to God (Silberling, 1995). However, just the activity of reaching outside oneself through prayer is powerful and should be explored. Ijaz et al. (2017) found that those in the Muslim faith who practiced prayer on a regular basis along with mindfulness had a better outcome in mental health. Daily life can produce stress and Messianic dance should be studied to see if there is validity in relieving stress. One study that used qualitative and quantitative data examined teachers who participated in prayer (LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2016). The study found that prayer was associated with job satisfaction. Participants who prayed frequently reported greater satisfaction with their job (p. 1446).

**Jewish Religion.** In a qualitative study (Bayes & Loewenthal, 2013) on defining how religious Jews relate to depression, the common themes that arose included the tremendous stigmatizing people face within the community if they are diagnosed with depression. The most important thing within Judaism is to preserve life. According to rabbinic literature, the main

causes of depression include personal failings (sin) and external stressors (p. 853). Although in coping with depression, it is thought that suffering leads to repentance, prayer, salvation, and gratitude; ultimately all these can bring joy (p. 853). It also says that the study of the Torah, prayer, and doing acts of kindness fights depression (p. 853). Jewish literature says to be deliberately joyful. Rabbi Nachmann of Bratzlav believed,

Despair is shunned and solace and encouragement are provided by niggun (tune or melody), dance, communion with the Righteous One, and prayer. To be joyous is a divine obligation. If you are sick or depressed, you dance. Through dance and body motions, joy is aroused (p. 854).

The rabbinic literature suggests cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies to combat depression which are all spiritual in nature (p. 854). It is very important to use and try all non-medical or non-pharmacological alternatives first because medications can affect the brain (p. 856). There was a consensus on Frankel, and his logotherapy. It is important to find meaning in faith and life (p. 854). Because it is important to preserve life, the therapist should have the same religious view so as to not deride the Torah and God (p. 854). Other alternative ways to do this include relaxation, exercise, art, drama, and music. King David and Saul were given as an example of using music to soothe a hurting person (p. 857). Looking to God, singing psalms, prayer, and touch were thought to be effective therapies for depression (p. 857).

### **The Biblical Feasts and God Attachment**

Messianic dance is rooted in Judaism and Messianic Judaism. A person who is in the Messianic movement most likely will practice all the biblical holidays outlined in Leviticus 23, in the Torah. These include the weekly observance of the Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles; there are other holidays such as

Hanukkah and Feast of Purim. The Lord gives specific directions for observance and sacrifice. There is something to be said about observance and spirituality. Dance is an expression of worship and a sacrifice of praise. Hebrews 13:15 is taken literally: “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016).

When a person participates in Messianic dance, whether Jew or non-Jew, the focus is on God; He becomes the focus of attention and adoration. Thomas (2005) says, “People were created by God to enjoy secure, intimate attachment to parents, loved ones and to God Himself, and to others. Every person is hardwired by the Creator to seek and maintain intimate, personal relationships” (p. 1).

Like Bowlby’s attachment theory, which is a theoretical concept related to human protection with a care-giver’s physical nearness (Granqvist, 2021), God attachment has been shown to bring (Pirutinsky et al., 2019) better mental health. God attachment also includes four other criteria according to Nygaard et al. (2020). These include a place to go to amid danger, a secure base that provides a sense of security to explore, separation distress, and a figure that is more powerful and wiser than oneself (pp. 491-492). In a qualitative study of nine participants who were all believers in Jesus, their phenomenological descriptions included healing visions of God, feelings of warmth, being held like a baby in God’s hands, hearing His voice, a sense of intimacy with Him, and experiencing waves of His love. Pirutinsky et al. (2019) found in a study that observance in the Jewish religion can place God as an attachment figure where emotions can be regulated, and support can be felt in times of stress (p. 162). In their study, “attachment to God emerged as the strongest predictor of mental health among both more traditional Orthodox Jewish participants and less traditional non-Orthodox Jews” (p. 167). Deuteronomy 4:4 says,

“But you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive today” (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016).

Wilder et al. (2020) agree. In their study of using inner healing prayer as a modality in therapy, they stressed the importance of attachment to God through The Life Model constructs of Christianity and theology (p. 51). Attachment to God in a secure environment fosters healthy relationships, communication as if one is participating in an adult discussion, and an active presence of Him in daily life even when issues come up for the client that are hard. This coupled with inner prayer can provide the client with joy and growth (p. 51). As well, the prayer was intended to bring a sense of God and peace (p. 53). They also stress the importance of cleaving to God and recognizing His loving kindness (p. 53). When one participates in Messianic Dance the focus is upon God.

### **Jewish Culture**

Messianic dance is part of the Jewish culture even though the Jewish culture does not embrace Messianic Judaism as a Jewish entity (Abramovich, 2009/2011). Jewish folk dance is the foundation of Messianic dance (Silberling, 1995). At almost any Jewish wedding, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, dance will be a response to the celebration. Not only that, but Israeli dance is part of a community expression. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Israeli dance could be found every day of the week in every city and was quite a social pastime for men, women, and children. In Gollance’s (2019) qualitative ethnography study, it provided insight into Hebrew Jewish culture and tradition in customary life cycle events. Dance is a part of almost all the life cycles in Jewish culture and in a phenomenological case study on Israeli dance by Yardena Cohen, the results showed that the modern state of Israel, came to be in part, because of the dance (Rottenberg, 2017).

As a result of the Holocaust, Jews came back to the land of Israel with their different

cultural expressions. Though all Jews, they were French, German, Polish, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch. As well, participating in the dance was healing for them. In a mixed methods study of religious dance teachers in Israel, several things were found. The study contributed to theoretical and practical dance knowledge. It also contributed to Jewish culture through dances about society, political, economic, and historical facts of Jewish Israel. It helped with interpersonal and social education in communication. Finally, it contributed to physical and spiritual development (Perlshtein, 2017).

Currently, another type of dance that has become popular in Israel is called trance dance. It is secular; however, these types of parties would be planned on a religious holiday. Schmidt and Navon (2017) did an ethnographic study on Israeli trance dance between secular and Orthodox Israelis. Each group was looking for something they could not find in their daily life. The secular Israelis were trying to find a way to escape the daily uncertainties of living in the Middle East, and the Orthodox were looking for a mate.

### **The Arts**

Art-based spiritual care is beneficial for many people. These may include fine arts such as painting or drawing, poetry, music, and dance. In a qualitative discussion on the arts and healing, Ettun et al. (2014) shared about the Jewish concept of caesura and when there is a disruption in one's life due to illness or trauma. The nature of the event could otherwise be completely debilitating, such as the knowledge of having a terminal illness. They found when art is encouraged including dance, by the one who is in the position of spiritual caregiver, it can drastically change the trajectory of the event. People have processed their caesura with poems, pictures, drawings, songs, plays, and dances. Benefits include more joy, fulfilling a need to be creative, making life more real, becoming more of a whole person, building bridges through

diversity, and fulfilling the need to appreciate art and beauty (p. 2). Several clients found healing and enabled patients to experience wholeness. Quoting from the great Hasidic Rabbi Nahman of Breslov, “The power of music and dancing can move someone out of a state of melancholy and help him heal his soul” (p. 854). This certainly could be something Messianic dance can also provide.

A qualitative, arts engagement study by Irwin et al. (2022), which focused on connectedness, hope, identity, meaning-making, and empowerment had a positive outcome for participants with depression (p. 187). The researchers found that participating in a non-clinical community-based program may promote recovery from depression (p. 186). They saw that art created a calming experience, a way to let go of negative thoughts, encouraged social contact, and reduced isolation (p. 187). The participants found they felt more connected and less stigmatized (p. 193). They gained a sense of identity that counteracted negative cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns (p. 193). Participants found the experience enjoyable, motivating, energizing, and an ability to reframe situations (p.194). There were several themes that emerged from the study. First, there was a sense of belonging and social connection (p. 190). The arts were a source of behavioral and emotional change (p. 192). Art brought mindful awareness, appreciation, and meaning-making (p. 192). Finally, there was a de-stigmatization of having depression and the building of a positive social identity (p. 191).

### **Synchronicity**

Finally, something needs to be said about synchronicity regarding moving in a circle together to choreographed Messianic dances. Synchronicity would be defined as matching the actions metronomically with others (Mogan et al., 2017, p. 13). This can include activities such as dance, exercise, marching, and singing. It has been linked with social cohesion and



cooperative behavior (p. 13). It has been shown to create a positive effect on people (p. 13). In their meta-analysis, Mogan et al. found that synchronicity had a positive effect on social bonding and social cognition (p. 13). Tarr et al. (2015) believe that a chemical reaction in the brain takes place when synchronicity happens that influences positive social feelings and creates elevated endorphin levels (p. 1).

### **Physical Movement, Emotional Expression, and the Effect on Emotional Well-being**

Messianic dance involves physical movement and very often emotions are expressed while participating (Silberling, 1995). These two factors influence emotional well-being and should be noted as a theoretical foundation. In one study that compared dance, listening to music, and cycling exercise on emotional well-being, Campion and Levita (2014) found them to be effective. Dancing and passively listening to music enhanced emotional well-being and influenced the creativity of the participants (p. 140). In another study on movement with music to reduce depression in an elderly population, Castro Coelho et al. (2020) found that movement with music was effective as an intervention in mental health. It acted as both an anti-depression measure and a cognitive training tool (p. 49).

Battaglia et al. (2015) say that physical exercise affects mood through physiological avenues such as body temperature, adrenal activity, neurotransmission of dopamine and noradrenalin (p. 344). Exercise can distract people from stress and give a sense of control (p. 344). In their study of depressed inmates, the pre- and post-test showed that exercise was effective to alleviate symptoms after the first session and continued well beyond the final session (p. 351). The chemicals released by the brain helped the subject have a sense of self-worth and eliminated divergent thoughts (p. 351).

In a qualitative study on the elderly population and an exercise group that meets on a

regular basis, researchers used a humanistic perspective and found several themes (Killingback et al., 2022). First, they felt a great sense of togetherness (p. 165). They believed they belonged to something bigger than themselves (p. 166). They felt that their lives made sense (p. 167). They felt they were unique on the inside, not just elderly—being conformed because of the physical age of their bodies (p. 167). They felt that the regular exercise class was part of their daily journey and added to the rhythm of their week (p. 168). Finally, doing their exercises made their brain feel as good as their body (p. 169). According to Novak and Ellis (2021/2022), depression is a deficit of neurotransmitters that include norepinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin (p. 526). These work perfectly together to improve mood. Norepinephrine wakes up the brain and is related to self-esteem (p. 526). Dopamine relates to the feeling of contentment; serotonin relates to happiness and counteracts the stress hormone (p. 526). Amazingly, physical exercise boosts all three, unlike medication which may address only one and has no pharmacological side effects (p. 526).

Another group where exercise has helped are women with postpartum depression. In a randomized controlled trial (Özkan et al., 2020), it was found that exercise increased the serotonin in the brain and acted as a natural antidepressant; the exercise increased psychosocial wellbeing, decreasing anxiety and depression symptoms (p. 845). It was found to be a cost-effective intervention that helped protect the mother, newborn, and family (p. 849).

Zhang and Chen (2019) sought to find if physical activity is related to happiness. They did an extensive review and found that those that participated in physical activity for at least 10 minutes had more happiness than those that did not. Compared with inactive people, those that were sufficiently active had a ratio of 52% higher happiness level (p. 1313). It was notably the same for youths and older adults (p. 1313).

In a study by De Sousa et al. (2021) looking at the effects of quarantine on individuals during COVID-19, it was found that aerobic and resistance training exercises were effective against the surge in mental health disorders. Their hypothesis was that exercise is the gold standard and non-pharmaceutical approach healing for many chronic diseases. It should be a viable and first line treatment for those suffering from depression during lock-down. Exercise has benefits for the brain such as more blood flow to the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex; this causes neuroplasticity, neurogenesis, and the morphology of dendrites (p. 1326).

Leone et al. (2018) found that when a person has symptoms of depression along with decreased cognitive function, their cortisol levels are elevated. In their study of exercise training with patients with mood disorders, the results showed that based on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) depressive symptoms were significantly reduced (p. 272). As well, their self-perception and self-esteem were positively increased (p. 272). They found a decrease of almost 20% in cortisol levels and future research could prove promising (p. 272). Some specialized forms of exercise movement like Messianic dance are listed that include running, Pilates, Tai Chi, and bi-lateral movement.

### ***Running***

There are many aerobic-style Messianic dances that include running, skipping, hopping, and jumping. In a study (Fink et al., 2021) on the effects of running to decrease symptoms of depression, there was a positive correlation. Over the span of two weeks, the participants engaged in the activity for 60 minutes for seven days. Not only was there a significant reduction in depression but the exercise changed the structure of the hippocampus and a reduction in the post-test Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) scores (p. 76). In another study (Brush et al., 2020) of aerobic exercise compared to stretching to alleviate symptoms of

depression, both groups improved. The aerobic group had a decrease in symptoms of 55% and the stretch group 31% (p. 899). It also helped the participants who had previously used antidepressants (p. 896) and had cognitive symptoms.

In another study by Cole et al. (2021/2022), comparing Yoga to aerobic exercise for relief from anxiety, it was found that Yoga better-relieved symptoms of anxiety. Although, both depression and anxiety are lowered by endorphins being released through the activity (p. 282). However, for depression, the results show that aerobic exercise relieved symptoms better than Yoga (p. 285). One three-hour Messianic dance class may show benefits as well.

### ***Pilates***

Joseph Pilates developed this famous exercise system (Saltan & Ankaralı, 2021) which utilizes the coordination of mind, body, and spirit. Through evolutionary challenges, it is known to promote general wellness, strength, flexibility, psychological efficacy, and conscience to those who participate (p. 202). In previous studies, there was an improvement for patients with fibromyalgia and obesity where depression was a secondary disorder. In a current study of depression status, functionality, and pain in college students, it was found that Pilates and other therapeutic exercises were equally effective in relieving symptoms (p. 203).

### ***Tai Chi***

Though different than Messianic dance because it does not include worship of God or symmetric circles, according to Wang et al., (2014), Tai Chi is a type of mind and body exercise origination from China. It utilizes slow choreographed movements martial art defense moves that flow into each other like a dance (p. 605). It helps with balance, healing of the mind, and body (p. 605). It utilizes concentration, relaxation, breathing, and balance (p. 605). In a meta-analysis that looked at the efficacy of health benefits, Tai Chi was found to be beneficial for mental

debilities. These include depression, anxiety, and psychological wellbeing (p. 605). This activity was also found to be cost-effective, enjoyable, and have a high adherence rate (p. 606). However, more research is needed.

### Summary

The literature review has shown that Messianic dance is a Biblical form of worship to God (Silberling, 1995). It fulfills the Scripture to worship the Lord with one's heart soul, strength, and mind (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Deut. 6:4-9; Luke 10:27). The review has shown several points that overlap Messianic dance.

First, DMT helps people mitigate symptoms of depression and PTSD (Dieterich-Hartwell, 2017). In some forms, DMT (interoception) can bring mind, body, thoughts, and healing together. However, researchers found it needs to be improved (p. 43) and lack a biblical foundation that is in Messianic dance. In the Dieterich-Hartwell (2017) study, the limitations include treatment only for those who are traumatized. Messianic dance (Jewish folk dance steps set to contemporary worship music) can be done by any population as well as those in a Messianic Jewish congregation (Silberling, 1995). Kella et al. (2021) were successful in alleviating symptoms of depression with DMT in milder cases. Those with more severe depression symptoms reflected a need for longer courses of DMT treatment. In Brauninger's (2012) study, though DMT was found to be beneficial for psychological well-being, brought cohesion to the group, and satisfied a deep need, it had limitations. Their study was done with mostly women, and it may have touched on areas of spirituality transcendence, but more studies are needed to explore further. Messianic dance can be done with both men and women. The Bible records that David and Miriam danced (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, 2 Sam. 6:14; Ex. 15:20). Followers are encouraged to praise Him in the dance and worship Him in holiness (*ESV Bible*,

2001/2016, Psalm 149:3; 150:4; Romans 12:1-2).

The literature review has demonstrated that prayer, religion, and meditation can help people mitigate symptoms of depression and PTSD in patients with cancer (Eilami et al., 2019). The study of adding prayer aided in increasing life expectancy. They also compared another study that measured people with coronary conditions. Again, the results showed increased life expectancy. Messianic dance uses prayer, meditation, and mindfulness as a foundation; many times, after a dance workshop, attendees have remarked that they feel better even to the point of being healed. As well, the study by Chung et al. (2016) gave reason to believe praise dance is a positive experience and helps people have a greater sense of wellbeing. The limitation of this study was that it was only for Christian praise dancers. Messianic dance is done in a group setting and danced in a circle with other Believers (Silberling, 1995). The focus is not to be on the dancers but on the Lord.

Israeli dance is part of the Jewish culture since Biblical times as well as modern times. Rottenberg (2017) says Israeli dance is healing in her case study, even though it was secular and devoid of spirituality. Perlshtein (2017) said that Israeli dance had many healing qualities in her study. The study sheds light on religious, female dance teachers. Perlshtein expressed a desire to study the perceptions of religious dance teachers compared to secular ones in the future. In a study of Messianic dance, these variables may be uncovered in the interviews of participants.

Messianic dance is not secular though it can be done by secular participants. They would be welcomed; however, the workshop begins and ends with prayer. Just like Psalm 24:3-4 (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016) acknowledges that followers must come before Him with clean hands and a pure heart, it gives the attendee an opportunity to come before Him in humility. Messianic dance is spiritual because one meditates on the Scriptures and the Lord as the dance is executed.

Each of the previous studies included in this review touched on areas that Messianic dance touches. These areas include biblical foundations, Messianic Judaism, defining depression, dance movement therapy, religion, Christian praise dance, the arts, exercise, social relationships, and Jewish culture. Much of the literature cited has been effective to alleviate self-reported symptoms of depression. However, until now, there are no studies that answer questions about Messianic dance.

The questions of this study are: (1) How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? (2) How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? There are no previous studies on this topic. A current study to answer the questions would help to fill in the gap. It is possible that Messianic dance could be quite beneficial for those suffering from self-reported symptoms of depression, a lack of joy, need healing, or just need to experience more wellbeing in their life and are looking for a non-pharmaceutical way to cope.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Overview**

This phenomenological study was qualitative and examined the Messianic dance camp experience and if there was a change in participants' mood well-being and self-reported symptoms of depression. This chapter will describe the overall design and specific research methods used in this qualitative investigation. The following design considerations will be discussed: The phenomenological dance experience, participants, data collection through survey and interview techniques, and methods of data analysis and evaluation.

### **Messianic Dance**

Messianic dance is Israeli style, circle folk dance set to contemporary worship music. It is usually done during worship time at a Messianic congregation of Jews and non-Jews who believe in Jesus. It is a scriptural activity demonstrated by several people in the Bible. This current study examined the Messianic dance experience and if there was an improvement in mood well-being through a phenomenological qualitative study.

### **Mechanics of a Messianic Dance Workshop**

The workshop is held at a venue hosted by Believers in Jesus. It can be a congregation, fellowship, or private party. The workshop is led by the facilitator. With the attendees in a circle, it begins and ends with a prayer. Everyone shares around the circle and states their name. The first dance is taught by the facilitator in parts. Then, they go over each part, making sure each attendee can execute the step. There is a Scriptural explanation of the dance and song. Finally, when the dance is learned there is a prayerful meditation added to the dance. The attendees are encouraged to think about a spiritual application while engaged in the movement.



### **Current Research on Messianic Dance**

There is very little research literature on Messianic dance although there is some on related topics. Therefore, the present research benefits those looking for non-medical or non-pharmacological alternatives to mood betterment, as well as the scientific community. This methods chapter will include descriptions of the qualitative study, phenomenology definition, research question, participants, procedure, methodology, interview questions, trustworthiness, and data analysis.

#### **Design: Qualitative Phenomenology**

This study was qualitative. Curry et al. (2009) say qualitative research is a systematic strategy for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (p. 1443). It gathers information about phenomena that cannot be measured quantitatively. It describes the derived information in terms of words and concepts, rather than in numerical or statistical data (p. 1443). Heppner et al. (2016) say that qualitative research touches several disciplines that include sociology and anthropology (p. 357). Qualitative study methods help people understand an occurrence known as a phenomenon. A phenomenon has unique properties that do not lend themselves to quantitative and standardized measurements. The data compiled and interpreted includes notes from the field, interviews, discussions, photos, and recordings (p. 358). This researcher understood that it is extensive and complex (p. 359). The research is meant to get the perspective of the one who has experienced the phenomenon and generalize the event into themes. It recognizes the value of subjective assessments by qualified persons. More than numbers, this design allowed the participant's experience with Messianic dance to be analyzed, and how participating in it makes them feel. The very essence of dance, as in all expressive art and movement, is by its nature very personal, subjective, and phenomenological.

What people experience, or the benefits they receive when they participate in expressive arts and dance, are subjective. Their experience or phenomenon is difficult to be objective or quantitative. Heppner et al. (2016) say that this type of research involves understanding the complexity of the participant's experience from their perspective (p. 357). Phenomenon and personal experience do not lend themselves to quantitative methodology. This design was selected because this writer had experienced the personal phenomenon of mood enhancement and joy while participating in Messianic dance. She felt better than she did before she danced.

Finally, there are benefits to using a qualitative study. First, empathy was learned from interacting with multicultural subjects as this researcher learned about their lived phenomenon (Heppner et al., 2016). Second, close connections were made in the relationship between this researcher and the subjects, which in turn may have alleviated a power differential (p. 361). And third, because of the nature of the study, it is likely to be relevant to counseling and other social science fields (p. 361).

### **Phenomenology**

Creswell et al. (2007) give examples of selecting and implementing five different qualitative approaches. It is important to choose a design that not only is applicable to the study topic but is accessible to the researcher. Because of these two points, a phenomenological design was chosen. This type of design allowed this researcher to collect the views of several different subjects and describe what they had in common while living through their phenomenon they had experienced (p. 252); after which, a composite picture of the phenomenon was made. There are two main theories of phenomenology. The first is hermeneutical. This means to interpret the texts through steps. These include having an interest in the topic, interpreting the themes, writing a description, and then balancing the parts that are written. The second is transcendental. In this

type, the researcher brackets themselves out of the study and instead, tries to get a fresh perspective by hearing and discovering the phenomena for the first time (p. 254). This current study was of this genre. This researcher stated the phenomena, bracketed their own views and experiences with Messianic dance, collected the data from others who have experienced Messianic dance, analyzed the data, and condensed the data into themes. One of the ways to bracket out personal experience is through memoing and keeping a journal.

### **Research Question**

Curry et al. (2009) say there are reasons for developing a good research question. It makes clear what the research will be. It helps to define the gap in the research and determine the methods that will be used. It will guide the planning of the research, set up the findings, and keep the research on track. The question also needed to be exploratory. The goals of the question included stating the question with a verb, defining the topic of interest, using neutral language, naming the sample, the setting, and being specific. The research and sub-research question for this study were: How do participants describe their experience participating in a Messianic dance workshop? How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being?

### **Settings**

This study took place in two separate locations. The first setting was at the dance workshop venue located in New Mexico and Colorado. After signing a consent form, the participants completed the dance workshop, completed a post-questionnaire, and agreed to an interview. The second setting was via a Zoom meeting and was set in the hotel where the researcher was staying, and the home or other location for the participant.

### **Participants**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the participants of this phenomenological study were from a purposeful sampling pool. There was a selected sample, sampling strategies, and sample size (p. 158). They had attended a Messianic dance workshop, completed a post-questionnaire at the workshop, and based on their responses an interview was set. This was a criteria-based sample because they had experienced the phenomenon and were able to articulate their lived experience (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 389). The criteria to select appropriate participants included screening questions, a completed post-questionnaire, a discussion of the participant's availability for a Zoom interview, a critical assessment of the research problem, the richness of the data, and the findings toward the research target (p. 390).

These were people who wanted to be involved in a research study. They had responded in person at a Messianic dance camp registration table that they were over 18 years of age and had experienced Messianic dance at least five times; in that way, they had been prescreened. They wanted to participate in a study by taking a post-questionnaire and completing a Zoom interview. This researcher was an observer because they had initially met the participants at a hosted dance workshop (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168). They would have preferred there to be 10 to 12 participants to interview in-depth. However, there were 10 because one dropped out. There were two men and eight women. However, the participant number was based on the data that came forth (Curry et al., 2009, p. 1445).

### **Participant Selection**

This researcher had a criteria-based sample of 10 participants, as one dropped out, who understood the phenomena and were able to articulate their lived experience of Messianic dance (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 389). After completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and approval (Liberty University, 2020/2021), data collection began. It was in two parts.

### **Procedures**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (Heppner et al., 2016), there are five phases and tasks of qualitative research. The first is recognizing that the researcher must be multiculturally competent because they will attend to their own biases in all areas while trying to draw out an untouched description of the participant (p. 362). The application for the study went through Liberty University's IRB. It took two months to be approved going back and forth with acceptable changes. Phase two is the selection of paradigms and perspectives (p. 362). It is important to make an informed decision because it will inform the study on an appropriate direction to go (p. 365). It was fine because that allowed this researcher the time to plan dance workshop venues for the study, secure the Zoom platform, and finalize the logistics. The third stage is having a strategy in place to inquire and collect the data (p. 366). They gathered the data in two parts. The first was via a post-test questionnaire, and the second was through an interview with the participant. The fourth stage is deciding how to collect the data and analyze it (p. 362). The last stage is an interpretation of the data (p. 362). They used Husserl's Free Imaginative Variation method by first examining the phenomena from all possible angles (p. 391). Finally, Curry et al.'s (2009) method of analyzing data was used (p. 1446).

### **Role of the Researcher**

While teaching and facilitating thousands of Messianic dance classes over the years, this researcher has witnessed attendees recount how they have felt emotionally and physically better after dancing. There have been many times, after teaching a Messianic dance class, an attendee will approach and share how they have been suffering from a particular trauma, and dancing with others unto the Lord, helped them. This is completely understandable because it certainly was the case in their own experience while participating in Messianic dance.

Although the one researching this topic has great experience in this field as well as experiencing benefits from participating in it, those values were filtered out. In this way, the focus was on the participants and what they had experienced (Heppner et al., p. 358), rather than their own bias. They did this by journaling and memo writing throughout the research study (p. 362). This was a qualitative study with constructivism undergirding. The study interpreted the perceptions of the participants, understanding that their realities were varied, though each was a valid assessment (p. 7).

### **Data Collection: Part One**

This researcher has a ministry called Messianic Dance Camps International (MDCI) (2021) and has been to over one thousand venues instructing this type of dance. Attendees register on-site up to an hour before the workshop begins; they are asked to give their email address if they would like to have correspondence updates from the ministry. It was here that the potential participants were asked pre-screening questions (see Appendix E) to be involved in the study. If their answer was affirmative, they were invited to participate. They were then asked to sign a consent form. A few minutes before the conclusion of the dance workshop, participants were invited to take a short post-questionnaire which was collected. It was a modified questionnaire protocol that endeavored to elicit assessments on effect from the participants on key constructs regarding depression and emotional well-being related to Messianic dance.

### **The Questionnaire**

The post-test was loosely adapted from the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D). According to the APA (2021), the BDI is a 21-item self-reporting questionnaire that measures depression characteristics and attitudes; the questions are related to the DSM-5 qualifiers for diagnosing depression. It is easy to

understand, and it only takes 10 minutes to complete (Olino et al., 2012). The CES-D is another questionnaire that was developed to measure self-reported symptoms of depression in caregivers for their previous work week (APA, 2011).

There were evaluation questions and space for voluntary, personal revelation. As well, the questions were about current and previous Messianic dance experiences. Kazdin (2016) says that it is important if a researcher has multiple measures that support the same construct. It was from these survey responses that qualitative interview inquiries were made. The purpose in utilizing the questionnaires was to elicit interviewee considerations of the participant's own depression and mood factors, and not for the purpose of psychometric measurement of affective variables.

**Psychometric Characteristics.** A brief discussion of psychometric characteristics is important. When a researcher chooses and uses a measure, it is imperative to have reliability and validity. Both are broad concepts. According to Kazdin (2016), reliability refers to the consistency of scores over time, the consistency of how the items in the measure relate to each other, trustworthiness, and the consistency of how the measure has performed over time. Are the results of the measure able to be produced again under the same conditions? An example of reliability in qualitative research is that good quality recording equipment is in place to verify transcription (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Validity relates to the content of the measure and if it assesses what it is deemed to do (p. 208). Construct validity is the degree to which the test can measure a variable that relates to the hypothesized theory (Heppner et al., 2016). External validity is the degree to which the causal relationship can be generalized (p. 141). Internal validity is the amount of certainty about the causal relationship between variables (p. 140). Content validity is evidence that the items on the

test reflect the domain being measured (Kazdin, 2016, p. 210). Face validity is exactly what is stated. On the surface, it may appear reasonable, effective, and reliable based on perception. However, there is no empirical data to support this type of validity (p. 210).

According to the APA (2020), the BDI and CES-D have high internal consistency. This is inclusive of construct and content because they effectively measure what they are supposed to. The questions of both are based on criteria of the DSM-5 that measure major depressive disorder (MDD). Even though a person cannot judge based on face validity if these measures are adequate, both only take an average of a few minutes to complete. Also, a person with at least a fifth-grade education level is most likely to understand the test (para. 1). Toledano and Contreras-Valdez (2018) concluded in their study that the BDI is valid, reliable, and culturally sensitive for measuring depression symptoms. They found it an effective test for both somatic and cognitive causes (p. 10).

**Post-test.** This researcher adapted their questionnaire from studying the BDI and CES inventories since they are organized around the generally accepted diagnostic criteria for major depression as specified in the DSM-5 (APA, 2020). This researcher was hopeful the questionnaire items would elicit self-reflection on the part of the participants, as well as suggest material for the follow-up interviews. No formal claims were made regarding the psychometric validity or reliability of these questions, other than their attempts to establish some construct validity and face validity based on established criteria for assessing major depression disorders. The questionnaire items employed were as follows:

1. Messianic dance lifts me up if I feel sad.
2. Messianic dance is exciting.
3. Messianic dance is good for my eating habits.



4. I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop.
5. Messianic dance allows me to enjoy my job more.
6. Participation in Messianic dance helps my sleep.
7. Participation in Messianic dance is positive.
8. I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance.
9. I have clarity after I participate in Messianic dance.
10. I feel happy with people after I participate in Messianic dance.
11. I feel better than I did before the class.
12. Please share any thoughts you may have about the dance workshop on the back.

The construct validity and face validity of the first 10 statements were based on the diagnostic criteria for depressive disorder as established in the DSM-5. The item statements are intended to reflect the criteria and are designated as follows.

Statements 1 and 7 fall under A1 section of the DSM-5. The person has a depressed, sad, and hopeless demeanor or the person has a depressed mood every day. These show face validity because the statements appear to measure what they are stating. As well, they also show content validity because they are based on the BDI and CES-D.

Statement 2 falls under section A2 of the DSM-5. The person has diminished interest in activities. According to the APA (2022) this statement has face validity because it appears to measure what it states and content validity because it represents the same portion of the BDI and CES-D.

Statement 3 addresses change in appetite. This statement falls under section A3 of the DSM-5. The person is losing or gaining weight with an increase or decrease of appetite. It has face validity because it is clear as to what it says. It also has content validity because it measures

what it says it measures and like the BDI and CES-D.

Statements 4 and 5 measure section B of the DSM-5. The person has difficulty functioning in social or occupational situations. Both statements have face validity because they appear to measure what they say. Also, the content validity is similar to the BDI and CES-D.

Statement 6 falls under A4 of the DSM-5. The person has insomnia or sleeps too much. This has face validity because changes in sleep are part of the BDI and CES-D. It appears to measure what it states. Again, because the BDI and CES-D are strong measures, and the statement is based on them, it has content validity.

Statement 8 deals with fatigue. This statement falls under A6 of the DSM-5. The person has fatigue daily. The statement has face validity because it appears to measure what it says. It also has content validity because it is based on the BDI and CES-D.

Statement 9 addresses the ability to concentrate. This statement falls under A8 of the DSM-5. The person has difficulty concentrating or making decisions. It has face validity because it appears to measure what it says and content validity because it is based on the BDI and CES-D which measure symptoms of depression.

Statement 10 measures agitation. This statement falls under A5 of the DSM-5. The person experiences agitation or retardation. It has face validity because it appears to measure what it states and it has content validity because it is based on the BDI and CES-D. According to the APA (2022), all of the statements have construct validity, because as a whole, represent the symptoms of depression as outlined in the DSM-5 and they are based on the BDI and CES-D.

In addition, there was one other statement below (Question 11), the participant would agree or disagree with. This researcher tested for change data of the participant of Messianic dance. The effect of Messianic dance upon the participant was questioned. The construct validity

is that the statement is set around the goal of finding if there was an effect change in the participant because of Messianic dance. There is reliability because of the internal consistency; the question is measuring overall the same thing as the previous questions. There is face validity because the questions appear to be measuring the effect of Messianic dance on self-reported symptoms of depression. There is content validity because Statement 11 supports the 10 before, in that, they measure what they say they are doing. Finally, it has construct validity because they support the overall theme of symptoms of depression or lack of due to Messianic dance.

Question 12 gave the participant the opportunity to discuss their phenomenological experience of the Messianic dance workshop. Finally, based on their responses, the researcher allowed time during the Zoom interview to explore the participant's emotional enhancement or mood change as noted in the questionnaire.

### **Data Collection: Part Two**

Once the questionnaires had been evaluated by the researcher to see if the participants have experienced the phenomenon, they were asked if they would like to participate in the second part of the study, which was an interview. The phenomenon would be if the participant's post-test shows change because of participating in the dance workshop. The interviewer attempted to bring the questionnaire self-reports into the structured interview.

Regarding the Messianic dance participants, Curry et al. (2009) say that one cannot decide on a sample size beforehand. Instead, it is dependent on the data coming forth and if new concepts are emerging (p. 1445). It is important to identify people who have experienced the phenomena. This was not difficult. These participants were people who had attended a dance workshop, had completed the questionnaire, had an email on file with the researcher, responded to an invitation to participate, and signed a consent form. Once identified and the criteria were

met, the participant was scheduled for an interview.

### **The Interview**

This researcher was able to conduct in-depth interviews to draw out the participant's rich experience (Curry et al., 2009), keeping in mind that the researcher needed to skillfully guide the interview. A Zoom meeting package was purchased that allowed them to video record the interview with transcription. This type of interview allowed for distance challenges, because the participants were located in different states, New Mexico and Colorado. The guidelines this interviewer attempted to follow were from Heppner et al. (2016). The interviewer scheduled hour blocks to give each participant enough time to articulate their lived experience (p. 389). The participants had been previously given an informed consent written statement (p. 389). The participants understood all the components, knowing they would not be named in the study, would be given a pseudo-name to assure anonymity, and know that they were free to resign from the study at any time (p. 70).

**The Interview Questions.** The interview questions were asked in a semi-structured, open-ended discourse (Creswell et al., 2007). As well, there was a structured interview framework in place for the researcher to follow. Curry et al. (2009) said the questions are an interview guide or framework (p. 1445). In this way, it provided an opportunity for the participant to fully express themselves. There were main questions and then probing ones that followed. The following questions were in themes, before the Messianic dance workshop and following the workshop. They included background, feeling, and experiential routes (Heppner et al., 2016). These questions were also based on the participants' surveys.

1. I know we have met, but how did you hear about the dance workshop?
2. Would you tell me why you came to the dance workshop?

3. You mentioned on your post questionnaire that you had recently experienced (name some of the answers) before the Messianic dance workshop. Would you tell me about that?
4. How did you feel while you were participating in the Messianic dance workshop?
5. Would you tell me about what you described on the back or anything else you would like to share?

Questions 1 and 2 were ice-breaking questions that invited the interviewee to open up and talk (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's goal was to be warm and to invite social interaction (p. 163). Question 3 relates to the questionnaire and how they were feeling before and after participating in the workshop. They would show each participant the post-test they filled out and ask them to remember why they answered the way they did. This question has face validity because it appears to ask a question directly related to their post-test. It has content validity because the question relates to the answer the participant selected; these were related to the BDI and CES-D (APA, 2020). This question has construct validity because the theme is constructed around DSM-5 symptoms of depression. Question 4 wants to know the participant's point of view while experiencing the dance workshop (p. 164). Finally, Question 5 was based on their post-test questionnaire. This question had construct validity because the theme is constructed around the relief of DSM-5 symptoms of depression or the increase of better mood because of participating in the Messianic dance workshop. This question is the basis of the study and gave the participants the opportunity to share their subjective experiences.

Heppner et al. (2016) said there would likely be additional probing questions asked and as each participant responds, new information emerges and will proceed depending on the data. These questions included:

- (1) Would you please tell me more about that?
- (2) When you described that portion, you mentioned a word, expound on that? (p. 374).
- (3) How would you describe Messianic dance as being the same as secular exercise?

Types of probes included nonverbal, reflection, and clarification (Curry et al., 2009, p. 1445). As well, probing questions can keep the participant on the correct path rather than a tangential course. Of course, there are some things to avoid while interviewing. These include asking the participant leading questions, moving too quickly to another topic, and interrupting the participant (p. 1445).

### **Data Analysis and Evaluation**

The data examined the surveys in connection with the interviews, including the diagnostic criteria of the DSM-5 for self-reported symptoms of depression. Curry et al. (2009) said that data interpretation is started by reading back and forth between the transcribed narrative data. Codes were then made from phrases that identified a key essence. Then, the codes were used to make categories of the chunks of narration (p. 1446). Code structures that were made included quotes from the participants and that took on the form of a hierarchical outline to include the main codes with sub codes under.

The research question was put into the structure to make sure of staying on track. The coding approach was an inductive grounded method. This researcher went line-by-line and compared the themes that emerged. This limited preconceived results (p. 1446). As the research evolved the codes were renegotiated, expanded, and refined (p. 1446). A qualitative data organizational software was considered to be used to manipulate the data and support transparency in the research; however, this researcher decided not to because according to Wu et al. (2016) do not ensure scientific rigor or objectivity (p. 500). Heppner et al. (2016) agreed the

process is fluid and ever-changing. A data storage system was in place within their laptop computer before the study began so that data and findings could be cataloged. Once all the data was coded and processed it was then interpreted. The goal was to synthesize the essence of the phenomenon so that it may be understood by its readers. For this type of study, untouched data in the form of direct quotes made for a good description (p. 376). Finally, it was important to address the limitations of this qualitative study, because the results may not be generalized to a larger population (p. 377); however, further studies can now be generated.

### **Trustworthiness**

It was important to have trustworthiness in this study. A quality study will have thoroughness, reliability, validity, credibility, authenticity, engagement, and carefulness. Morrow says, there are four areas to ascribe trustworthiness. Social validity, self-reflexivity, data adequacy, and adequacy of the interpretation (Hepner et al., 2016, pp. 378-379). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) said that trustworthiness in a qualitative study needs to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is similar to internal validity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). For qualitative research, it is important to make sure that recording the participant's experience of the phenomenon is accurate. Bias in its various forms can destroy a study. According to Pannucci and Wilkins (2010), bias occurs when there is a systematic error in sampling, testing, or encouraging one outcome over the other. Self-reflexivity is necessary for qualitative research to help explore the researcher's bias and establish trustworthiness (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 379). The way to achieve this varies. However, in all domains, the researcher bracketed out their biases. In a phenomenology study, memoing, taking notes, or keeping a journal is done

throughout the entire study to reflect on what is being learned, as well as thoughts, values, and beliefs (p. 379).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is connected to reliability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This happens when one researcher can follow another researcher's work via an audit trail. Strategies for this include peer participation, detailed descriptions, and repeat studies (p. 15). This was the first study of its kind; a future study in this area will now be able to use this rule. The questionnaire that was modified and designed for this study was loosely based on the BDI and CES-D. They are known to be reliable measures and would assuage bias (APA, 2022). The validity in this area was evaluated based on how it informs not only other researchers, but gives value to other practitioners, participants, society, and the researcher (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 378). Thomas and Magilvy (2011) said that confirmability happens when credibility, transferability, and dependability have all been attained. The researcher must be flexible in observing how the study unfolds; they must bracket out their preconceived ideas or expectations.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is like external validity. The research hopes the findings may be transferable to other subjects and groups (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). One of the ways is by giving rich descriptions and demographics of participants. This study utilized 11 participants, but one dropped out. However, if more data were beneficial more participants would have been utilized.

Heppner et al. (2016) said data adequacy takes into consideration that the participant interviews must be rich enough to include all the subtleties. Complex findings must be supported by the data (p. 379). The data must be saturated by seeking out surprising findings, including



unusual conclusions, and disconfirming examples (p. 379).

Adequacy of interpretation is what was strived for and can be accomplished by making sure that the data is communicated succinctly because the researcher is absorbed in the data (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 379). Tracy gave credence to eight points for a rich study. These included having an important topic, good study constructs, transparency on the part of the researcher, reliability, elevating the reader, contributing to society, and the study being ethical, and coherent (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 380). These were the overall goals of this current study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethical considerations for the study needed to be understood throughout the entire process. The post-tests were given immediately after the dance camps. Each participant was assured that participation was voluntary; they all had signed a consent form and were told their names would not be disclosed. A fictitious name was assigned alphabetically in order of their interview, gender, and culture (p. 55). The participants were also told that the data would be stored in a secure location; as well, the purpose and use of study data were disclosed (p. 55).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. The goal was to have a rich qualitative study on the phenomena of Messianic dance. The study's main and sub-research questions were: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? The study was transcendental phenomenological; the researcher bracketed their biases out of it by memoing, journaling, and taking notes. After IRB

acceptance, the data was gathered in two parts. The first part was from participants at a Messianic dance class who completed a post-questionnaire loosely based on the BDI and CES-D (APA, 2020). This was a purposeful sample pool. Based on their responses, interviews were scheduled with the participants. There were 10 criterion-based participants who completed the study, though the study began with eleven.

The second part of the study was the interview. It was approximately one hour long and conducted via a Zoom platform package. This enabled the interviews to be recorded and transcribed. This also allowed for an interview with a participant anywhere in the United States. After the data was collected, it was coded and organized. It was then uploaded to a computer program storage system within the computer so that the data could be cataloged. The interpretation of the results synthesized the essence of the phenomenon so that it would be understood by its readers. Finally, the quality of this study is based on Tracy (Heppner et al., 2016). It is an important topic, has good study constructs, transparency on the part of the researcher, reliability, will elevate the reader, contributes to society, and the study is ethical and coherent (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 380).

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. The central research question that guided this study was: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? There was also a sub-question included: How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being?

This chapter begins with an introduction to the 10 participants. Next, the results of the post-test questionnaires, individual interviews, reduction into significant statements, and reduction into theme development based on Moustakas's approach (Creswell et al., 2007). Chapter Four will conclude with a summary of the findings from the data collection.

### **Participants**

There were 11 participants who each attended a Messianic dance workshop in their area. There were seven Messianic dance camps held in New Mexico and Colorado between March 18, 2023 -March 26, 2023. The venues were hosting congregations or private fellowship groups. The first dance workshop was held following a Shabbat service. This researcher and her husband were asked to give an introduction during the service about their ministry and an invitation to the congregants to attend the workshop. The other six dance camps were held as standalone events. Each participant came to the registration table to sign in 30 minutes before the dance workshop began. At that inception point, they were asked the study's screening questions. To be included in the study, they needed to be over 18 years of age, complete the dance workshop, have participated in Messianic dance at least five times including the present workshop, complete a post-test questionnaire after the dance workshop, and attend a Zoom interview within two weeks

of the dance workshop to discuss their completed questionnaires as well as their experience at the workshop.

Each three-hour dance workshop included an opening prayer, two and a half hours of instruction, a dance demonstration presented by the instructor (me) and my husband, fellowship time, a review of dances learned, and a closing prayer. Before each participant was given the post-test, they first signed a consent form that was approved by Liberty University's IRB. Each participant was given a copy of their signed form for their records. This was emailed to them within 24 hours. One of the participants decided to drop out because she was unable to make the time to provide the Zoom interview after the previous criteria had been met.

This was a criteria-based sample of 10 participants who understood the phenomena and were able to articulate their lived experience of Messianic dance (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 389). Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and reflect their culture, and that corresponded with the order of their Zoom interview. The first was given a pseudonym that began with the letter A, the second participant was given a pseudonym with the letter B, and so on.

There were some notable similarities between the participants. First, several of the participants were over 50 years old and most were women and non-Jewish Believers which is consistent with the demographics of each of the dance camps that were attended between March 18, 2023-March 26, 2023. Second, eight out of the 10 questionnaires were marked "Agree" on all of the questions (Questions 1-11) except for Question 3 which was marked "Disagree" for two of the participants (see Appendix C). Finally, all the participants were enthusiastic to participate in the study because they had a love for this style of dance and they each have known benefits in their lives because of participating in worship through Messianic dance.

**Table 1***Characteristics of Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Messianic Dance Experience	Dance Workshop #	Venue Type	Jewish or Non-Jewish
Alison	Female	50-60	10 times	2	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Bella	Female	28-33	10 years	1	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Consuelo	Female	30-35	10 times	1	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Delia	Female	60	8 years	1	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Ethan	Male	61	30 years	2	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Francis	Female	60-70	20 times	2	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Goldie	Female	75	25 years	3	Congregation	Jewish
Hadley Victoria	Female	65	20 years	3	Congregation	Non-Jewish
Iris	Female	50-60	10 years	4	Congregation	Non-Jewish
James	Male	67	5 times	5	Library	Non-Jewish

**Allison**

Allison was from Workshop 2, a standalone workshop held in the fellowship hall of a Messianic congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is an administrator at the hosting congregation and has been involved in Messianic Judaism for quite some time. She has participated in Messianic dance for over 20 years at various congregations including this one but has never been to one of the workshops. She was happy to be there. She was busy setting up the space, moving the furniture to provide space for the dance workshop, and making sure this researcher had everything needed. Though the researcher's ministry had been there 10 times in the past 10 years, this time they felt it important to come because the congregation needed a dance leader and one of the other attendees who came seemed to be a potential candidate, and

Allison wanted to support her.

I'm hoping, Frances (pseudonym), who, has recently taken the responsibility over of kind of leading the dance ministry, but she doesn't really know a lot, and I have been a dancer for 20 years and so I'm really familiar. I came because I think that it could be helpful if there were dances that you were teaching or that were on your projects that we are doing or might use for services or like a holiday presentation. So, I was kind of coming to see if my maybe being there would be something that I could help her incorporate into our dance.

### **Bella**

Bella came to Workshop 1, which was held after the weekly Shabbat service at the congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She helped to coordinate the workshop at her congregation for the researcher's ministry. She has grown up in the congregation and is the daughter of the congregational leader. She has been on the musical worship team and has been a dance leader for several years. However, she has had to step back from taking on the full responsibility of leading the dance because she has small children at home and her time is limited. She thinks that Messianic dance is an integral part of the worship service, and she encourages others to be involved. She speaks fondly of Messianic dance even when making a mistake.

When you mess up, you're really embarrassed. But then they're laughing, and you're laughing, and then they mess up, and it's just so ... It's so lighthearted and fun. You're not even embarrassed to make a bad, or wrong move, because they're so simple. And you're like, okay, "Well, yeah, that's pretty simple." When you put it all together. You're like, "Wow! We just did this whole song."

**Consuelo**

Consuelo came to Workshop 1 which was held after the weekly Shabbat service at the Messianic congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is a new member of the congregation and has danced about 10 times. She was not planning to attend the dance workshop after the service because she was not feeling well. She said, “I was kind of sad I was dealing with some things you know, and I wasn’t dancing for a period of time.” However, she decided to attend after the researcher’s ministry was introduced during the Shabbat service. She said,

They (the congregation) sent everyone a message - they wanted to know if I wanted to do it – so, I didn’t know - I wasn’t prepared - but at the same time I was ready to do it - and when you guys did your testimony, when you shared it with us, that changed my mind, - I should say the state I was in, and I felt invited to stay. I felt God was saying we need to stay.

**Delia**

Delia came to Workshop 1 after the Shabbat service at the Messianic congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico with her husband who also participated. However, for him, it was his first time participating in Messianic dance. They had been a part of the congregation for the past eight years. Several years ago, she was diagnosed with tendonitis. The doctors told her she had to live with the pain, and that she would never maintain normal movement. At the time of her diagnosis, they had a trip planned for Israel. She chose not to cancel the trip and pushed through the pain. She insisted on recounting the story.

My husband said we’re going to have to cancel the trip and I said “no” this is one of my dreams I want to go to the Holyland, even if we have to rent a wheelchair, we will do it. I want to go. So, after we left the United States, and after three planes, my feet were

hurting even sitting down and they would hurt when I'd walk. It hurt! Anyways, when we got to the Holy Land, I didn't bring my painkillers. I didn't do anything. I forgot the pain, there was no pain! I went up and down hills - mountains! We walked everywhere. The guide was concerned because I told him the situation two months before, but I said I'm fine. People got tired but I didn't get tired, so honor and glory! He healed me in that place but when we came back the pain came back as soon as we hit the land.

After they went to Israel, they longed to be a part of a Messianic congregation, and on the very first day, Delia was drawn to the dance.

My first experience was I love the message. I love God in my heart. I know the Word is alive and I saw the dancers. There was a group of 10 ladies, and I loved it! The (dance) leader, she didn't know me, she approached me, and she asked if I would like to join the dance. I said, "I love dancing, but I've never done this." She said "Anybody can join us and anybody can learn. Just come prepared." Next time when I got there, I jumped in. I was holding my husband's arm because I couldn't stand up. But the next Shabbat came, and I went. I was limping. It was hard to walk to the front (to dance). When I finished, I told my husband, he would not believe this. I said, "I don't have any pain when I'm dancing and walking," but when I stepped out of the congregation, my feet started hurting again and it went like this for 2 to 3 months. But then my physical and my spirit and my soul were healed.

She has participated in the dance ever since.

### **Ethan**

Ethan has been a dear friend and Messianic Believer for the past 25 years. He came to Workshop 2 which was a standalone afternoon workshop at the fellowship hall of a Messianic



congregation. He has been a part of the Messianic movement for over 35 years and has been dancing ever since coming to a Messianic congregation. He was part of an Italian dance troupe before he became a Christian. He thought that once becoming a Believer there was no place for secular dancing and gave it up. After he joined a Messianic congregation, he was coaxed by the members to join the dance and eventually tried it. He has been dancing ever since. He described his dance.

I feel like I want to be excellent, in my movements, and do it as unto the Lord. So, I want to do it as best that I can with all my movements in the dance, because I feel like He is worthy of my best. All my movement, my worship, my thoughts, my actions, that's where, really my mind is occupied with: To be excellent before Him and whatever I do in the dance and as I worship.

### **Frances**

Frances came to Workshop 2 which was a standalone workshop held in the fellowship hall of the Messianic congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She seems to be in her sixties. She has been to three other dance workshops that our ministry has hosted and was excited to be there. She said,

I was just enjoying looking around and watching everybody else enjoying it and so that was nice, but my favorite is the Shabbat Shalom (dance). I just love the words and then - the movements - and everything is just so precious to me. I can do it now pretty good so I can just move and listen to the words, and praise the Lord as I'm dancing, I'm concentrating on where to move my feet, my legs and everything.

### **Goldie**

Goldie is a Messianic Jewish Believer who is 75 years old. She came to Workshop 3. It

was a standalone workshop held at a Messianic Synagogue in Denver, Colorado. The researcher had been there many times with their ministry. However, this was the first time meeting her and she was excited to participate in the study. She has danced for many years both secular and Messianic styles. She said,

God made me wired - a kinetic person. Words don't always do it for me. I need to move I need to do that - that's just who I am. When I dance, worship is a priority. It's a connection with God. It's no other way. It's very special. I think the only other thing that equals that is when I am in nature and I just able to be it's quiet and I could just feel God's wrapping his arms around me, so it's something that feeds me it feeds me.

### **Hadley Victoria**

Hadley Victoria came with Goldie to Workshop 3 in Denver Colorado. They are friends. She was on her way to Colorado for a family visit when she heard about the workshop from two friends. She had attended our workshops years before in both California and Colorado. She enjoys the dance workshops.

Oh, to learn more steps - to learn more choreography and dances you know, plus the fellowship plus the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is just what we're created for - what we're designed for - to worship the Lord to encourage each other - to have fellowship in the Spirit - and you have a lot of expertise and you're an excellent teacher. You're easy to follow.

### **Iris**

Iris came to Workshop 5 in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This was a standalone workshop held in the sanctuary of a Messianic synagogue. The researcher met Iris 10 years ago at a dance camp at her congregation in Oregon. She had since then moved to Colorado Springs, gone

through many trials in her life, and heard the ministry was going to be giving a dance workshop near where she was living. She said,

I was up in Oregon with a Hebraic fellowship - Don Marsh (pseudonym) was the Pastor and we went to a place in Canby Oregon, and you were there, it was wonderful and that's how I found out about you guys. I was excited to see you again. I've been missing dancing. My body longs for it. I need it spiritually and I just know it helps me worship Him. It helps me heal and I couldn't wait to get there.

### **James**

James and his wife hosted the dance workshop in the community room at their local library in Glenwood, Springs Colorado. This was James' fifth time participating in Messianic dance. He is 67 and quite fit. He was preparing to leave on a several-month bike ride ministry tour, preaching Jesus along the way. In speaking of his experience at the dance workshop he said,

When you're able to dance together and worship the Lord, it's unifying, because the Holy Spirit is a unifier and brings us together, worshiping the Lord in the beauty of it for me to be able to experience the depth.

### **Results**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. The data was obtained from 10 participants who shared their experiences through a post-workshop questionnaire and Zoom interview. The results brought forth four major themes. The first major theme was God is in the Midst. The second theme was People Feel Better and Healing Goes Forth. The third major theme was There is a Strong Sense of Community. Finally, the fourth major theme was Messianic Dance is a Type of

Exercise.

### **Theme Development**

As discussed in Chapter Three and the beginning of Chapter Four, participants for this study were acquired at pre-scheduled dance camps they attended. The dance camps were held in New Mexico and Colorado over a two-week period. These workshops were set up in advance by MDCI. The congregations and private fellowships had hosted dance workshops in the past for the ministry. Each participant entered the dance workshops at least 30 minutes before the instruction began. They were each greeted at the registration table, and at that time the researcher asked the screening questions (see Appendix E). If the potential answers were affirmative, they proceeded to read the screening recruitment script (see Appendix F). If the person agreed to participate in the study, they were told that they would be given an informed consent form (see Appendix B) to sign and the post-test questionnaire to complete at the end of the dance workshop. After the informed consent form was signed, the post-test questionnaire was given. Once returned, they scheduled a Zoom video-conferencing meeting for each participant. The participants were also emailed a copy of their signed informed consent form within 24 hours.

Eleven participants joined the study; however, one woman was unable to make time for the Zoom interview and she dropped out. Each was given a pseudonym to protect their identity, and reflect their culture, and that corresponded with the order of their Zoom interview. The results included in this report were from eight women and two men: Allison, Bella, Consuelo, Delia, Ethan, Frances, Goldie, Hadley Victoria, Iris, and James. This researcher also emailed a copy of their completed post-questionnaire for the participants to refer to as the questions were being asked. Some of the participants were unable to access the document because they were using a phone or computer while doing the Zoom interview. In those cases, they both held their

document up to the monitor so they could see what they had written or selected, and they also read back to them what they had written down on the questionnaire.

The Zoom interview included both video and audio recordings. The interview was also transcribed by Zoom. After consulting with the researcher's Chair, the decision was made to remove filler words from the transcript, such as like, you know, um, etc. This was done for the readability of the final document. To have a fresh perspective while each participant spoke, they kept a journal termed *epoche* (see Appendix G), to bracket themselves out of the study. This method is based on Husserl (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 388). After each interview was completed, they transferred the transcription to a separate and individual document with the link and passcode of the participant's interview. They then compared the transcription to the video and made the corrections to the transcription of the document. Once they had verified the accuracy of each of the participant's interviews, they repeated the process again making sure the transcription was correct. They then emailed each participant the link to their interview along with the transcription so that they might also verify that it was a true representation of their experience. Iris wanted to exclude the name of a hospital she spoke of and preferred a pseudonym for that.

As examined the interviews in connection with the questionnaires were examined, the researcher began re-reading back and forth between the transcribed data. The themes were developed through Husserl's Free Imaginative Variation method (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 391). First, the phenomena of Messianic dance was examined from all possible angles through the interviews of the participants to understand the essence of what they each experienced. Using Curry's method of data interpretation, codes were made from key essences of the interviewee phrases (Yale University, 2015, Video 5, 01:33). First, the phrase was highlighted and given a phrase numerical code. The codes were then used to make categories from the chunks of

narration (02:09). Code structures were made with the participants' phrases and took on the form of a hierarchical outline (04:16) to include the main theme codes with sub codes that are listed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Hierarchical Outline of Themes*

Hierarchical Outline of Themes	
Research Question: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop?	
Research Sub-Question: Do participants in a Messianic Dance workshop self-report improvements in mood well-being and relief from feelings of depression?	
I.	God is in the midst. (1)
A.	Holy Spirit connection. (2)
1.	Shalom/peace (3)
2.	His presence (4)
3.	He is seen by others while watching the dance demonstration. (5)
B.	It is like dancing with my Father in Heaven. (6)
1.	Wanting to give Him excellence. (7)
2.	He gives hope for the future. (8)
II.	People feel better: Healing goes forth. (9)
A.	The questionnaire (10)
B.	Emotional (11)
1.	Lifts me up when I feel sad. (12)
2.	Works against discouragement. (13)
C.	Physical (14)
D.	Spiritual (15)
III.	There is a sense of community. (15)
A.	Camaraderie (16)
1.	Holding hands. (17)
2.	It's fun. (18)
B.	Synchronicity (19)
C.	Messianic Judaism (20)
1.	Israel (21)
2.	Jewish (22)
IV.	Messianic dance is a type of exercise. (23)
A.	Physical activity. (24)
B.	It is energizing. (25)
C.	It is exciting. (26)
D.	Different than secular exercise. (27)

The researcher chose not to use data organizational software as it did not ensure or

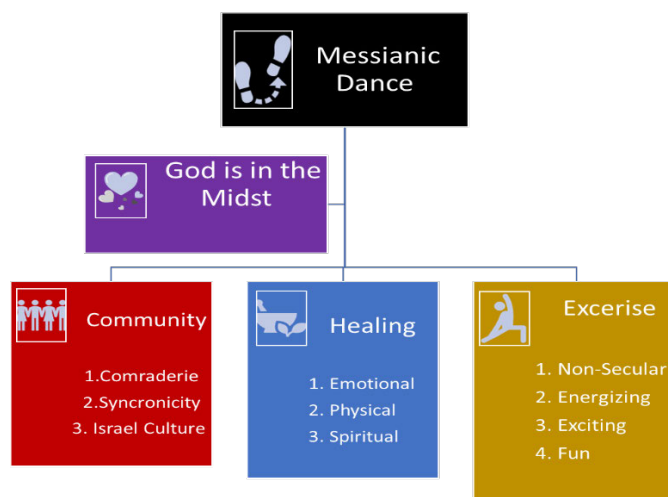
replace the direct analysis (Wu et al., 2016, p. 500). Then, important statements from the interviews and formulated meanings were extracted. Once the data were realized, renegotiated, expanded, and refined, themes were grouped from the participants' experiences of Messianic dance. Four themes emerged that interrelate with one another. First, God is in the Midst of Messianic Dance. Second, People Feel Better and Healing Goes Forth in Messianic Dance. Third, There is a Sense of Community when Participating in Messianic Dance. Finally, Messianic Dance is a Non-Secular Type of Exercise.

### ***Theme One: God is in the Midst of Messianic Dance***

This sample of participants was from multicultural backgrounds, and all were Believers in Messiah Yeshua. The consistent thread running through each of the participant's understanding of the phenomenon was the acknowledgment that God is omnipresent in their midst while participating in the dance. Theme One permeates all the other themes as in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Researcher's Organization of Theme One Permeates the Other Themes*



When all the participants described their lived experience of participating in the Messianic dance workshop, they knew God was in their midst and His presence was there. Delia

said, “I feel closer to God like I’m there like I’m touching him you know like He’s dancing with me.” Allison described her experience,

Whenever we’re worshiping, and the presence of the Lord is there, it’s joyful and filling. And to be able to worship again expressing with all of my body and with my mouth, and with all of me. That is very worshipful. I don’t know how else to say it.

**Holy Spirit Connection.** As the participants danced in the workshop, they explained that they came from their daily activities into something different. They were connected with the Holy Spirit and sensed His presence, felt His shalom, and peace. Hadley Victoria said, “The anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is just what we’re created for what we’re designed for – to worship the Lord.” Iris stated,

I feel like we’re all lifted up maybe in the Lord’s hand. I feel the connection with Him. It is like the dance is the conduit for a closer a spiritual connection to Him and I can’t express the joy that it gives me.

Goldie said,

When I dance worship it’s a prayer. It’s a connection with God. It’s no other way. It’s very special. I think the only other thing that equals that is when I am in nature, and I am just able to be. It’s quiet and I could just feel God just wrapping His arms around me, so it’s something that feeds me. It feeds me.

As well, God is seen by watching the dance. When conducting a workshop, the leaders demonstrated a dance for the attendees, as well as provided instructional DVDs that they could purchase for home viewing. Many are new to dance, but it helps them get an idea of what the dance looks like in complete praise and worship. Allison, Bella, Consuelo, Iris, and James shared in the interview about seeing God in watching the dance. Hadley Victoria stated, “I love your



teamwork with you and your husband. It's powerful!" Bella agreed and said,

I feel like there was a totally different anointing when you and Ralph were dancing. It's the way you both were worshipping together. The atmosphere changes. We were just watching. We weren't dancing. We were just watching. But those feelings were still there.

Iris said, "I believe that you're so light on your feet you move like the Ruach (Holy Spirit) – a gentle breeze I was just amazed!" She continued, "In the past when you did that dance with your husband, the *Elohim* duet, it taught me about healthy marriage versus codependent pendency, and this time with a *Rain Down* dance, I had a vision while you were dancing." James went further: "God used you as messengers. I have experienced people as God's messengers and thought 'I know they're human.' I experience the Holy Spirit in them and it's like they're being used as angels of God."

The same sentiment is felt in watching the instructional DVDs at a later date in their private dwellings. Hadley Victoria stated, speaking of the Holy Spirit, "I love your teaching thank you I love your teamwork with you and your husband. It's powerful!" Consuelo said, "I just could not wait to go home and play the instructional DVD and dance again I can see you guys are so blessed!" Allison shared regarding the DVD: "I would just spend my days in the Word and worship and dancing!"

**Dancing with the Heavenly Father.** Another aspect of the description of God being in the midst while participating in Messianic dance, was the sense of dancing with their Heavenly Father. Dalia, Ethan, Frances, Goldie, Iris, and James stated in their interviews that participating in the workshop helped the aspect of dwelling in the presence of the Father. Delia said, "I feel like I'm dancing with my Father, and I know He is with me, and He dances with me and it's just

different. It's just different." Frances stated, "Whenever you just have your child dancing with you, how much joy it brings you, so that I feel like I bring joy to Him, and He brings joy to me because He loves me." She continued, "I guess I just really feel loved, and I am like his child even though I'm an old lady." Goldie's connection with her Heavenly Father through Messianic dance was transformational:

Messianic dance helped me connect to my Heavenly Father as Father. Plus, the fact that I could worship as a Jew. I'm more Jewish than I've ever been my whole life and I might get spat on by my unbelieving yet Jewish brothers and sisters, or whatever. And they may not consider me Jewish, but you know what? I am. I know who I am. And to be able to worship as a Jew. To have that connection where I had no connection, there was no real family. There's, you know, violence and abuse, and all that. But there was no family. Now, I have a Heavenly Father, who loves me. I have the Holy Spirit God dwelling inside of me, active and alive, as is His Word. I have Yeshua who loves me who died for me. I didn't have any love growing up. This is a powerful thing.

Ethan felt that it was important to give one's best to the Father. He said, He is worthy of my best – in all my movements in my worship, in my thoughts, in my actions. So, that's where, really my mind is occupied with – to be excellent before Him and whatever I do in the dance and as I worship.

James shared another aspect of being in the midst of God the Father,

It seems like discovering something that I was just designed for as a Believer – as a new creation. It's like I was designed for this. It was natural in that sense. In fact, it was more natural than walking.

Finally, Iris mentioned a special hope that she realized while she danced before her

Heavenly Father:

Hope, for the future, it's such a dark world. I'm very grateful that the Father has come up with a sort of thing with you guys in the workshop, because I think I would be really missing part of my worship to Him if I didn't have the dance because that's been a major theme of my healing with Him. I asked Him. I cried, and said 'I'm not ungrateful, but things have been so hard. I'm so grateful but you could've healed me right away. Why did it take so long?' He said you would've missed the dance.

***Theme Two: People Feel Better and Healing Goes Forth in Messianic Dance***

The second theme that emerged was that people felt better and healing went forth as a result of participating in Messianic dance. The healing was described physically, emotionally, and spiritually with God being the catalyst. Also, a post-test questionnaire was given at the end of the dance workshop to see if there was any effect change in the participant and to elicit self-reflection for the follow-up interview.

**The Questionnaires.** As stated in Chapter Three, the researcher adapted the questionnaire (see Appendix C) from studying the BDI and CES-D inventories since they are organized around the generally accepted diagnostic criteria for major depression as specified in the DSM-5 (APA, 2020). No formal claims were made regarding the psychometric validity or reliability of the questions, other than an attempt to establish some construct validity and face validity based on established criteria for assessing major depression disorders. The researcher was hopeful the questionnaire items would elicit self-reflection on the part of the participants, as well as suggest material for the follow-up interviews. The planned interview question to ask the participants regarding their completed post-test was: You mentioned on your post questionnaire that you had recently experienced (name some of the answers) before the Messianic dance

workshop. Would you tell me about that?

As noted in this researcher's journal/epoche, that question was unable to be addressed and had to be modified because eight of the 10 participants circled "Agree" on all the statements; the other two circled "Disagree" on the same question. Please see Figures 3 and 4. Because of this, the modified question then became I noticed you circled "Agree" on all of the statements. Would you please describe why? Would describe your top three?

### Figure 3

*Ten Participants Circled "Agree" on All the Statements*

Please Complete this Questionnaire After you Complete the Dance Camp

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in our dance camp. We are always looking for ways to improve the dance camp experience. Please help us evaluate and improve our dance camp ministry by carefully completing this questionnaire. We are interested in whether you may have experienced some personal benefits or changes because of participating in this dance camp. Please feel free to write additional thoughts and suggestions on the back.

Based on This Class Please Circle Agree or Disagree for Each Statement.

1. Messianic dance lifts me up if I feel sad.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
2. Messianic dance is exciting.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
3. Messianic dance is good for my eating habits.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
4. I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
5. Messianic dance allows me to enjoy my job more.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
6. Participation in Messianic dance helps my sleep.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
7. Participation in Messianic dance is positive.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
8. I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
9. I have clarity after I participate in Messianic dance.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
10. I feel happy with people after I participate in Messianic dance.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
11. I feel better than I did before the class.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
12. Please share any other thoughts you may have about the dance workshop on the back.		

*I was able to dance without joint pain - I am HEALED!*

Ten of the participants agreed that the dance workshop lifted them up from feeling sad. It was exciting. They enjoyed the fellowship. It made them enjoy their job more. It helped them

sleep. It was positive. It was energizing. They experienced clarity afterward. They felt happy with people, and they felt better than they did before the class. In asking about her completed questionnaire, Goldie summed it up about her healing, “Yes, it was healing. You have no idea where I come from and how much God has done with me, emotionally spiritually physically. Because I’m focusing on God.”

#### Figure 4

*Two Participants Circled “Disagree” on the Same Statement*

Please Complete this Questionnaire After you Complete the Dance Camp

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in the dance camp. We are always looking for ways to improve the dance camp experience. Please help us evaluate and improve our dance camp ministry by carefully completing this questionnaire. We are interested in whether you may have experienced some personal benefits or changes because of participating in this dance camp. Please feel free to write additional thoughts and suggestions on the back.

Based on This Class Please Circle Agree or Disagree for Each Statement.

1. Messianic dance lifts me up if I feel sad.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
2. Messianic dance is exciting.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
3. Messianic dance is good for my eating habits.	Agree	<u>Disagree</u>
4. I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
5. Messianic dance allows me to enjoy my job more.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
6. Participation in Messianic dance helps my sleep.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
7. Participation in Messianic dance is positive.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
8. I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
9. I have clarity after I participate in Messianic dance.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
10. I feel happy with people after I participate in Messianic dance.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
11. I feel better than I did before the class.	<u>Agree</u>	Disagree
12. Please share any other thoughts you may have about the dance workshop on the back.		

**Emotional.** Much of the emotional healing people expressed was in response to the questionnaire statement, *Messianic dance lifts me up when I feel sad*. They also felt less

discouraged. In talking about the dance workshop that was held after the weekly service Consuelo said,

On Shabbat, I was kind of sad. I was dealing with some things, and I wasn't dancing for a period of time. But yesterday, when you guys said your testimony, and when you talked about how the dance can heal, that touched me. I said, "I have to dance it doesn't matter what, so I have to dance." When I went to dance, I forgot everything I was thinking about the situation that I was dealing with. My emotions were healed yesterday, and that sadness I had was gone.

Delia had a similar experience that day: "Before the class, I had had an incident with a person. I was down, feeling sad, because of what had happened. And coming to the camp to dance in the class, it allowed me to forget about it."

The participants seemed to describe past experiences with Messianic dance. Bella had an interesting story from a previous time in her life. She expressed how Messianic dance made her feel when she was going through an emotional time.

I feel like during that time I was going through a difficult time in life. But let me tell you, just turning on the music. Nobody was there at the congregation. I had my own key. I would just drive over there. Turn on the speakers. And I would think, "Okay, how can I do a dance to this song?" My mood would just completely change right then and there. Just thinking about the steps to put together, when you get it to flow, then you get the chorus down, and then the verses. Okay, I kind of make (choreograph) them like that. Oh, I would feel 100% better, a 100% better!

Ethan has been participating in this style of dance for over a quarter century. He felt this statement was most impactful for him. He described the lived experience of how dance lifts him

up when he is sad.

Well, I took it to me that if I have my mind worrying about something or if I'm not feeling my best mentally, that this occupies my mind with the Lord and my mind is stayed on Him. I feel better than worrying about my life and the things that I'm wearing. When I'm thinking about what's pressing in my life, it puts things in perspective when I worship. I feel like I'm being lifted up – I'm being elevated. I guess you could say to rule and reign with Him, so I don't have to. I don't have my battles here by myself. I'm ruling and reigning with Him, so I put things into perspective what my life is. I could see it from a bird's eye view and then it's not that –ressing. Really, it's not that important. I guess you could say the issues that I'm dealing with here that had me concerned.

Though Frances has only been participating in Messianic dance for a few years, she expressed how it lifts her up:

When I am at home alone and sometimes, I have things going on and family or whatever and I'm feeling kind of low. So, then I will pray and then I sometimes journal but then sometimes I'm like to just need to get up and dance. I will put on one of your videos and I just dance with you guys. I just go into Praising the Lord and I feel better!

In their interviews, a few participants described how Messianic dance helps with feelings of discouragement. Hadley Victoria said, "I am focusing on the Lord and getting off the problems, stresses, pressures, fears, rejection, or whatever issues I'm dealing with." Frances said this about the dance camp she attended:

I think we come in with different things on our plate of different things were thinking about. Then the dancing seems to help everyone. At the beginning, I'm kind of frustrated with some of them because of things that they're going through, they have on their mind.

Or they're just good or whatever. I feel it. But then after dancing, it seems like they feel better and so then I'm happier with them. It feels like they're happy or just feels like we're all happier.

James and his wife hosted the dance workshop for my ministry. The previous week had been spent getting ready for a several-month ministry tour. He was going to be biking across the country proclaiming Jesus. He shared about emotional relief:

I could just say simply, before the class I was doing a lot of preparation for my bike journey. I had a lot of things I had to take care of. You might say I was, or I tend to worry a little bit so during and after the class I really had a sense of freedom from the worry and just more joy. I felt I feel better physically and socially. I had more peace, so I have more peace in my heart.

**Physical.** Though each of the participants' healing is intertwined with other aspects of healing, four people described their lived experience of physical healing. As a result of participating in the dance workshop, James said,

I really did see how it benefited my body and my mind. I don't exactly know why. But what I experienced was more of a whole fluidity and it's something that I really appreciate. Being at my age 67, you have to deal with stiffness, and you don't always have the same fluidity. You're first getting out of bed; you sort of feel like a beached whale and you're just trying to get your feet out. But when we're doing the dance, it was like how the Bible talks about how they wait upon the Lord so He renews their strength, and then will mount up on wings like eagles. And it was like that verse, about how they wait on the Lord and He will renew their strength. So, in a sense, that's what I experienced.



Hadley Victoria traveled many hours by car on the day of the dance camp. She had heard about the workshop while coming to visit family. She was driving from Sacramento, California to Denver Colorado. She said,

Traveling can be exhausting, but when we worship the Lord, I think it helps us physically, mentally, and emotionally. It probably just helps us physiologically. There's a rest in it, but there's joy and excitement in it. I think we're probably getting healed and in alignment with the Lord to move out be revitalized – refreshed. We feel better because our bodies are probably actually being healed and corrected and balanced.

Iris also shared what she experienced regarding physical healing as a benefit of participating in Messianic dance. When interviewed, she agreed with all the statements. However, she explained her phenomenon:

They're all very important to me. For my physical health, I had horrific health issues, and I've been under care for the last four years. To come out of that, something was missing in an exercise program, and it was too much pain to do that. However, when I did Messianic dance that's what brought me out in the physical sense. I lost all of my weight, I gained. I toned my muscles. I regained mobility that I didn't have, and I still regain that as I dance. I was once again, able to lift my arms above shoulder level, so that I could worship Him, and that all came from the dance. I'm not on any pain meds or antidepressants. The pain medication for my back surgery I was on fentanyl with oxycodone for breakthrough. I was on like the maximum number of antidepressants that you could have and sleeping medication. I'm not on any of it and that it was all the Lord, dancing, and functional medicine. The dancing has been a major part of healing and the (dance) circles took me away from chaos after a massive brain injury. I'm back to normal

lifecycles again. To understand that, and yet not just go around that mountain, the same old mountain is to rise up in the cycles of life and in the circle of dancing. It's just been amazing! I don't really know how to put it into words. I had to learn everything all over again I was in chaos for years until I started Messianic dancing. That started bringing me out of it, bringing more lifecycles to my mind, and to my circadian rhythm. Everything started changing. I can't express how massively important this dancing was in my life.

**Spiritual.** A few of the participants explained the spiritual side of their healing. For them, this aspect had to do with wholeness. Delia said, "Not only physically, but my spirit, and my soul were healed." Allison explained, "I had been very weak, spiritually and emotionally, just needing a lot of time and healing. The thing that He brought me to, was the Word, worship music, and seeing the dance." James had more to say:

It's a work of the Lord. The Lord brings Shalom. He brings it. He takes where there was alienation from God and from others, and He brings shalom, which is a sign of His kingdom. There is also a sense of completeness.

Iris concurred:

There's been so much healing in all directions, and including a sense of community, belonging, acceptance, and being part of a whole; where, in other ways, I felt disconnected because of the things that I had not processed out of yet.

### ***Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community***

Overwhelmingly, all 10 participants expressed in both the questionnaire and the interview the importance of community. The three areas within this theme included camaraderie, synchronicity, and Messianic Judaism.

**Camaraderie.** Each class began with registration and a time of fellowship. Once the

class was ready to begin, the dancers made a circle, held hands, and opened with a prayer. Many of the dances were ones that were choreographed with the participants holding hands. Two breaks were given during the class so people could get refreshments, rest, or use the restroom. This aspect was inclusive of fellowship, the fun of it all, and the power of touch while holding hands. Consuelo enjoyed this aspect of the workshop: “I was excited dancing. It was a unity in the spirit by dancing together and sharing with our brothers and sisters and thank you for leading in that.” Bella acknowledged, “I liked connecting with other people. A couple of those people were new that day, so it was interesting. I like meeting new people.” Allison said of the camaraderie at the workshop,

I think that just being a part of the community is positive. I think also just worshipping the Lord together in that way, where we are expressing our worship not just with our thoughts, or with our words or even with our song, but with our whole body I think that there’s something very good about that, and I think that you had mentioned something about doing things too. As far as today, I think the feeling better, having enjoyed the camaraderie thing and having enjoyed the conversations.

James also shared about the power of the fellowship that was inherently part of the workshop without even having to talk, impacted him. He said,

Fellowship is really a big one. To be able to do it, was just a very true experience of being with others, in the presence of God. Worshiping God really makes fellowship very rich and very meaningful. What I mean by that is, we were experiencing communion in a very deep way as we were worshipping God together. It was more than just a passive experience, of just listening to someone else talk. Sometimes it seems the only fellowship that’s offered, is answering somebody’s questions like in a class. It’s important to be able

to share what's on your heart and to grow and everything. But sometimes what's missing is being able to express praise to God together like we were able to do in the dance. The thing about it that was so nice, and that really blessed me so much was being able to participate together with others. It included the love of God, the worship, being able to express our love to God, and being able to allow your whole self to enter in not just thinking. But being able, without even having to use any words to show love to God and to experience love with others around.

Delia was very excited about being in the congregational workshop because her husband decided to join in. This has not been the case for them, and it was transformative.

OK. To start with, knowing that my husband decided to be part of that was big! My husband never joins me in the dance, not even when I'm home. I do it (dance) at home as well. Just seeing him there, my heart was rejoicing and seeing many people that join the class was awesome! Wonderful! Sharing that wonderful experience- to me it was incredible! Then afterwards, my husband and I talked for the 1 ½ hours that it takes us to drive back home. It was wonderful and it felt good. You know, you want to continue doing that and we were just so excited to be able to continue to do that in the congregation, in the community of believers, but also like I said, I do dance at home and hopefully my husband will continue to join me at home to dance.

Frances thought that being with others is beneficial for several reasons and she learned a great deal while participating in the class:

Just being around others who love the lord and hearing them talk about how wonderful He is and praising Him. I just felt a whole lot better. Also, listening to others, to what they're saying, I think about it. I process it. Sometimes it takes me a couple of days to

process what they're saying, but I learn from them. It feels like they feel a little more comfortable with me after dancing and then they feel like we are close. They can talk to me more.

The power of touch, being close to one another, and holding hands was an aspect of the camaraderie that some of the participants spoke about. Hadley Victoria said,

It's very spiritual worshipping the Creator. And then we respect each other. We're teaming together, we're bonding together, we're relating to each other in joining forces, reaching out to reach hands, and moving together. It's wonderful! As a team, there's real strength. We're holding hands while we're doing the dances. There's a real strengthening with holding hands, being a team, being a family and being a group together.

James also experienced the power of God through holding hands while dancing. He envisioned the Lord's crown while we lifted and held our hands up. It had been many years since he held hands with a Christian group:

In my family, we always had a circle of prayer and we held hands. But it's very seldom in any Christian worship that we hold hands and worship. When you took our hands, because there were times when we needed to turn right or we were going the wrong direction or whatever, it was wonderful. It was like the Lord was taking our hands. It was like the Lord was taking us on our journey. When we did that one dance, we lifted our hands together. It wasn't necessarily just holding hands or worshipping together with our hands, we formed a crown together.

**Messianic Dance is Fun.** Another important aspect of camaraderie is that the dance workshop is fun and provides enjoyment. Delia said, "I enjoyed the fellowship and seeing the rest of the people, men and women were enjoying it as much as I was, and we were laughing!"

Frances in response to the statement in the post-test questionnaire about feeling happy with other people said, “Dancing with other Believers and with you guys yesterday, it was just so much fun!” Iris was surprised by how she felt.

I didn’t know the people that were there except for Andrea, and I still felt a sense of community with them. As you taught us those many steps, and even some of the more difficult dances, by the time it was done we were doing it. It was so obtainable. It’s fun, it’s energizing, it’s unifying. I can’t put it into words what my heart feels. I feel like number one, like I’m part of the group.

Bella could not help but laugh when she made some mistakes while learning the dance. She said,

When you mess up, you’re really embarrassed. But then they’re laughing, and you’re laughing, and then they mess up. It’s so lighthearted and fun. You’re not even embarrassed to make a wrong move. Well, it’s pretty simple. When you put it all together, you’re like, ‘Wow! We just did this whole song.’ Yeah. I love that!

**Synchronicity.** The choreography in the dance is that the dance is danced together in unison. This aspect of the fellowship was brought up by three of the participants. Allision said, Synchronicity is important. I know that whenever I grew up seeing singing and choirs, I know that there’s something about learning a piece and being able to, especially for worship, seem together in a way that gives harmony. It’s like that with dance. It’s a unity that we’re doing as well, our heart worship together.

The statement by Hadley Victoria has to do with not only holding hands but with synchronicity in the dance. She said, “We’re respecting each other. We’re teaming together. We’re bonding together. We’re relating to each other in joining forces. To reach hands out and move together it’s wonderful.”

Iris explained being synchronized:

All the people that have been in your workshop, it gave me a sense of understanding that the community of the Lord is bigger it's earth wide. It's all one body, we're one. We can move as one, and though it's a whole.

**Messianic Judaism.** There is community inherently within Messianic Judaism.

Messianic dance is a part of Messianic Judaism, Israel, Israeli dance, and Judaism. When people attend a workshop, the dance is taught within the constructs of a Messianic lifestyle. This aspect of the community was mentioned in the interviews by seven of the 10 participants in their lived experience. The other three that did not mention it are part of a Messianic congregation. Ethan has been in the Messianic movement for over 35 years. He said that he loves talking with others while doing Messianic dance, "I like talking about the Lord with other people." Hadley Victoria stated,

We have so much in common: Loving the Lord, believing in Messiah, wanting to know our Hebrew roots and Jewish roots, wanting to learn Hebrew, the whole aspect of worshiping the Lord with reverence, it's a reverential worship. Most everybody taps to music. They respond. Almost everybody in the world responds to rhythm, but this is a wonderful way to move our bodies. It's respectful, a reverential way to worship the Lord, and edify Him. We can be edified. It's just like a mirror reflection we're blessing Him and we're getting blessed.

Consuelo spoke of ancient Jewish dance,

Men and women, I don't see dancing together. It happened a long time ago. It happened yesterday. It was nice to see men and women dancing together that does not happen. It was amazing to see so many women and men participating.

Allison said regarding Israel and culture,

It helps me to connect with Israel and with the history of culture and worship being able to worship the Lord and that way it's just really precious. I think it's exciting. It's also you know lovely. I would say even today just hearing some of what's happening in Israel, and we've been there a couple of times, so like the places you were describing and hearing with the Lord is doing, I think very encouraging.

Francis loved learning dances to two songs that were about celebrating the Shabbat and dance about the priests that were serving in the holy temple in the time of Yeshua. On her questionnaire, she spoke of realizing the steps in a deeper way. She said,

You know, the Shabbat song for one thing. We are raising our arms for the candles. I would've thought we were raising our arms, because I raise my arms and praise the Lord. But we're raising them as a (Shabbat) candle. It's a light, but there's a whole lot more to that.

She continued that learning the Shabbat song changed her:

Shabbat changed my life. It was a gift from the Lord. It's like it's time, no matter even if you're ready or not, you just stop and then just rest. You just focus on Him. I had never seen it that way. I just thought it was a custom of different things you do, you have to do. I just thought it was very mechanical and you brought meaning to it. I just thought that it was so beautiful, so I just love Shabbat.

She went on to talk about the last dance about the worship priests in the temple:

The last dance impacted me, presenting the holy things and the way they walked. It's not just walking. It's so much deeper than just walking around and holding your hands up. It's like you're stepping very carefully very purposefully and bringing my offering to the



Lord. I am bringing myself, all that I have in my hands. I see it's much more than walking with your hands up.

Iris spoke about her connection to the Jewish people through Messianic dance. She said, "I feel my connection to the Jewish people is growing having seen you again. I just love that it's growing." James spoke also about the impact of joining together with the Jewish people,

When you're able to dance together and worship the Lord, it's unifying. The Holy Spirit is a unifier and brings us together. Worshiping the Lord in the beauty of it, for me to be able to experience the depth, you know, as a gentile Christian, to experience the depth of joining together with the chosen people of God, and really being able to dance the Jewish Israeli expression of worship as a gentile Christian brings fullness.

Finally, Gloria, a Jewish Believer, experienced a different way to connect with her Jewish upbringing as a result of participating in Messianic dance:

I was raised as a secular, Jew. My family was Zionist, and you know, Passover meant nothing. I was born into a very violent family full of terror and all kinds of horrible things. So, this whole thing about a heavenly Father when I first came to faith, I thought, "I'm supposed to pray to my heavenly Father?" That made me cringe. It took a long time to sort out things and have a connection to my Father. I'm no longer in a victim mentality or that place, because of all the healing that I received that from God. Especially at that time, the more connection, in ways that were meaningful to me like Messianic dance.

#### ***Theme Four: Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise***

As the participants shared their lived experiences during the interviews, it was clear that all felt that they had exerted their bodies and used considerable energy. As a result, they felt they were involved in substantial physical activity. According to their post-test questionnaires, they

all felt energized. They also thought the Messianic dance was exciting. In a follow-up question, this researcher asked most of the participants if they thought it was the same as other secular based exercises. They all said it was different.

**Physical Activity.** Messianic dance is a physical activity. In the workshops they participated in, each danced for 2 ½ -3 hours with two short breaks in between. The dances had slow and fast tempos, and some people experienced exertion depending on their personal fitness levels. Bella, Hadley Victoria, and Iris all related it to physical exercise with some variations. Iris said, “It’s exercise and a healthy thing for the body. It’s just all-encompassing all in one and it’s free-flowing.” Bella said,

It’s some sort of physical activity. But I wouldn’t say it’s the same as working out.

Because when I run on the treadmill, I don’t feel the spirit moving like when I’m dancing in a circle. But you get the same sore muscles. I had sore calves. I was sweaty, we were we’re parched from water. It’s similar. But the emotion and the connection are different.

Hadley Victoria said,

It’s a combination because like I mentioned earlier, you’re contracting your muscles, so you’re getting lactic acid out of your muscles, the blood is flowing and cleansing, and there is some physiology. I’m sure it’s just like exercise and you become more flexible; you’re stretching.

**It is Energizing.** All the participants agreed with the statement, *I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance*. In their interviews about their lived experience of Messianic dance, six of the 10 participants talked of feeling energized. Bella talked of feeling energized and experiencing clarity, “After class, you just feel so energized. I don’t want to say the wrong word, but more open, you feel more energized. Your mood all around, is better. I have clarity.” Hadley

Victoria said, “It’s like an elation. There’s a joy and the gliding, it’s like ice-skating where you’re gliding it you’re flowing.” Iris said not only did she feel energized, but it helped her sleep, “For one, physically I feel more energized. I slept really good last night. I got revelation when I woke up this morning.”

Consuelo described her experience of not wanting to participate because she was tired, and the workshop was held after the weekly congregational meeting. However, once she started, she became energized:

You know what? On that day, on Shabbat, before, I felt really tired with no energy. And that’s one of the reasons that I didn’t want to dance. But as soon as I started, the energy came in and covered me, even in the periods that we had the 10-minute rest I had the energy to dance more. I think it was because the spirit of Yahweh was there.

James also related to the Holy Spirit in his recount of feeling energized: “I wanted to elaborate on that the energizing of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord strengthening me, which is what I think this is, what we all need on our journey of faith.”

Ethan said that he agreed with the statement, *I feel better than I did before the class*. He said, “I was tired. I had a long day. During the class I felt rejuvenated, I felt more awake and not tired anymore.” His experience included more concentration, feeling alive, and energized. He said, “I was very aware. I had heightened sense a learning. I felt stimulated that way. It made me concentrate and I felt alive. Messianic Dance energizes me, but I feel physically stronger during and after.”

**It is Exciting.** All 10 participants agreed with the statement, *Messianic dance is exciting*. As the participants recounted their experiences their statements and body language shared that sentiment. Ethan said that it encompassed all areas:

I feel it's exciting because it uses my whole being: spirit, soul, body, my mental capacity, and it's just exhilarating completely. I would agree that Messianic Dance is exciting to me. I was interested in learning new steps and utilizing them with new songs. It's always exciting to learn new dances and incorporate worship this way.

**Different than Secular Exercise.** Participating in Messianic dance can raise the heart rate, create soreness in the muscles, and cause perspiration. Since most of the participants felt that Messianic dance was a type of exercise, one of my follow-up questions for some was to find out if they felt it was the same as secular exercise. Seven of the 10 participants shared their experience. Goldie said, "I love music. I couldn't live without music, but Yeshua is not there. It's not dedicated to him."

Iris had tried other exercises with her chiropractor. She said, "I've tried other exercises like the chiropractor would give me and stuff like that. Davidic dance is a flow. It's like the Holy Spirit. It's physical as well as its worship." Bella said,

Maybe kind of similar. It is a big work out. My calves were sore after our class on Saturday! I would say it's the same as a physical, cardiovascular activity. I don't think it's the same as running and walking, because once you do, once you do get into that head space, that this is a form of worship, it just changes.

Consuelo was adamant that Messianic dance is different. She said,

No, definitely, no. Because it's exercise that helps your body and your heart, but this is the spirit, it's different. It's totally different. I think that the spirit it's connecting with Yahweh in and receiving everything that He has for us.

Delia has a weekly regimen of exercise. She participates in Zumba three times a week and walks daily. She does not feel that Messianic dance is the same. She explained,

It's nothing like that at all. I go to Zumba three times a week. I know about the muscles, and I know how you get tired physically when you work out your body. This is not only physical. This is mental and spiritual. It's emotional, its healing, so there is no comparison. Because like I said, when I walk, and I walk in the mornings, I enjoy going out and seeing nature. I even pray to the Father in heaven, but this is more intimate. This is something between me and Him, it's very personal.

Ethan appreciates the benefits of secular exercise but knows that there is a difference between the two. He said,

When I work out, I want to also do the best that I can with my movement and what's best for me physically, so that I can get the best the most out of my work out. I think that prophet as Paul, the Apostle states, that physical exercise profits some it says, but spiritual exercise, profits greatly. I don't know exactly what that scripture is, but I could find it easy enough, but that's how I feel when I exercise; physically, it profits me a little bit but my spiritual exercise profits be greatly.

Frances feels that Messianic dance is different from line dancing and other types of dance. She said,

For me, the way I see it, other dancing, is usually about moving your body and moving in a way that might kind of be like seductive, and cause other thoughts to come into your head. Some dances cause other thinking and that's what I love about Messianic Dance. Whenever you're thinking about the Lord, you are thinking about His name, His purity, and His holiness. I've done a little bit of line dancing. This is a whole different feeling. When you're done you feel good from dancing, for moving and stuff, feeling the rhythm in your body, and all that. But it's a different feeling. It's not a pure and wholesome

feeling.

### **Research Question Responses**

This section will examine how the four main themes and their sub-themes addressed the research question. There was one central research question and one sub-question for this study. The central research question was: How do dancers describe their experience participating in a Messianic dance workshop? The sub-question was: Do participants in a Messianic dance workshop self-report improvements in mood well-being and relief from feelings of depression?

#### ***Central Research Question***

This research question was addressed within all four themes. Theme One: God is in the Midst was divided into two sub-themes: Holy Spirit Connection and It is Like Dancing with my Father in Heaven. Under the sub-theme Holy Spirit Connection, participants felt the shalom and peace of God. They described how Messianic dance made them feel like they were dancing in His presence. They also felt that they experienced God by watching a presentation of Messianic dance in person and in the video. Under the sub-theme It is Like Dancing with my Father in Heaven, participants felt they were His child and they wanted to give Him their excellence. Some also felt that He gave them hope for the future.

Theme Two: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth was divided into four sub-themes which included The Questionnaire, Emotional, Physical, and Spiritual. Most participants shared their lived experience of describing Messianic dance by giving a testimony of how this type of dance was healing to them. Under the sub-theme Emotional, some participants felt that it was healing because it brought them out of a sad or discouraging place. Under the sub-theme Physical, two participants credit Messianic dance to complete physical healing. One woman had tendonitis and was told by a specialist she would have to live with it. She started participating in

the dance and within two months she was completely healed. Another woman had a severe brain injury with no range of motion, and she described Messianic dance as healing her. As well, an older male participant said that dance helped his fluidity in the morning. Under the sub-theme Spiritual, some participants describe Messianic dance as a way to heal and grow at times when they were weak.

Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community, was divided into three sub-themes: Camaraderie, Synchronicity, and Messianic Judaism. Under the sub-theme Camaraderie, participants experienced an enhanced appreciation of fellowship. They felt a sense of connection when they held hands in the dance, and that it was a holy way to give kingship to Messiah Yeshua. They also thought the workshop was fun dancing together. The sub-theme of Synchronicity, brought an aspect of unity to the workshop. Finally, the sub-theme Messianic Judaism connected participants to Israel, Israeli dance, and their Jewish roots.

Theme Four: Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise was divided into four sub-themes: Physical Activity, It is Energizing, It is Exciting, and Different than Secular Exercise. Under the sub-theme Physical Activity, the participants felt the Messianic dance workshop was like exercise. They experienced similarities of a workout with sore muscles and sweat. Under the sub-theme It is Energizing, several participants experienced becoming energized and exhilarated after the workshop even though they were tired before the workshop. Some felt it was the Lord that gave them the energy. Under the sub-theme It is Exciting, some participants experienced this in their whole being: spirit, soul, body, and mental compacity. It was exciting to learn new dances and choreography. Finally, under the sub-theme Different than Secular Exercise, many participants felt that Messianic dance was different because it had the component of the Yahweh.

### ***Sub-research Question***

The sub-research question for the study was: How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? Theme Two: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth and the first sub-theme, The Questionnaire, attempted to answer that question. All participants filled out a post-test at the end of the dance workshop. It was loosely adapted from the BDI and the CES-D. This researcher was hopeful the questionnaire items would elicit self-reflection on the part of the participants, as well as suggest material for the follow-up on the interviews. No formal claims were made regarding the psychometric validity or reliability of these questions, other than the attempts to establish some construct validity and face validity based on established criteria for assessing major depression disorders.

Eight participants circled “Agree” on all the statements (see Figure 2), with the other two participants agreeing on all one statement (see Figure 3). In asking the participants about this, they agreed that Messianic dance lifted them up if they felt sad, was exciting, they enjoyed fellowship at the workshop, they enjoyed their job more, it helped their sleep, it was positive, it is energizing, it gives clarity, feeling happy with people after participating, and feeling better than before the class. The only statement, that two people disagreed with was “Messianic dance is good for my eating habits.” According to the participants’ responses, I would say that this sub-question was addressed.

### **Summary**

This chapter detailed research findings from dancers’ lived experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop. Each of the 10 participants was described individually and within the group setting of the dance workshop, they were each a part of. Information was gathered in two parts. First, through a post-test after the dance workshop and then through a Zoom video



interview. After analyzing the data four themes emerged. These themes are Theme One: God is in the Midst, Theme Two: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth, Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community, and Theme Four: Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise. Theme One developed two sub-themes of Holy Spirit Connection and It is Like Dancing with my Father in Heaven. Theme Two developed four sub-themes of The Questionnaire, Emotional, Physical, and Spiritual. Theme Three developed three sub-themes of Camaraderie, Synchronicity, and Messianic Judaism. Finally, Theme Four developed four sub-themes of Physical Activity, It is Energizing, It is Exciting, and Different than Secular Exercise. These four themes with their 13 sub-themes described a dancer's experience participating in a Messianic dance workshop.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. This chapter includes a summary of the findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. There will also be a discussion of the study's empirical, theoretical, and practical implications. It will include the study's delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. Ten participants shared their lived experience of the phenomenon by attending a Messianic dance workshop, completing a post-test at the conclusion of the workshop, and participating in a video interview on the Zoom platform. The data was analyzed using Husserl's Free Imaginative Variation method (Heppner et al., 2016, p. 391) and Curry's method of data interpretation (Yale University, 2015, Video 5). This resulted in the emergence of four main themes. The themes are Theme One: God is in the Midst, Theme Two: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth, Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community, and Theme Four: Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise.

### **Research Questions Addressed**

To understand the participants' lived experience of Messianic dance, research questions were developed. The central research question guiding this study was: How do dancers describe their experiences participating in a Messianic dance workshop? There was also one sub-question: How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being?

The central research question yielded rich descriptions of all four themes. Theme One: God is in the Midst brought out the aspect that the participants had a connection to the Holy Spirit while they were dancing in the workshop; they could tangibly feel His presence, peace, and shalom as they moved. God could also be seen while watching a Messianic dance demonstration in person and on DVD that had been acquired previously. Participants also expressed feelings they were dancing in the presence of their Father in Heaven. They wanted to give Him their excellence and He gave them hope for the future. In Theme Two: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth, participants described their experience in relation to the post-test questionnaire. They explained their emotional healing and how Messianic dance lifts them up when they feel sad. At the same time, the dance worked against any discouragement they felt. They also recounted their physical and spiritual healing directly related to their participation in the dance. In Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community, participants described the impact of camaraderie at the dance camp. They not only had fun but holding hands brought a powerful aspect to the activity. They spoke of synchronicity and unity. Messianic Judaism was impactful within this theme. For them, it was inclusive of Israel, Israeli dance, and the Jewish roots of their faith. Finally, everyone felt that Theme Four: Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise, was a physical activity, it was energizing, exciting, and much different than secular exercise. They all felt Messianic dance was an essential part of their life.

The post-test questionnaire was an attempt to answer the sub-question: How do participants in a Messianic dance workshop describe relief from self-reported feelings of depression and improvements in mood well-being? The questionnaire was loosely based on the BDI and the CES-D. I wanted to use some of the participants' responses to generate questions for their interview to see if they expressed improvements in particular areas. All of the

participants agreed with all the statements in the affirmative, except two participants, who disagreed with the same question. They all felt lifted-up. They all felt Messianic dance was exciting. They all enjoyed the fellowship. They all felt Messianic dance allowed them to enjoy their job more. They all agreed it helped their sleep and that it is a positive activity. They felt energized and had clarity. They felt happy with people, and they felt better than they did before. Most shared during their interview that their mood and well-being had improved as a result from participation in the workshop. A few shared that the dance helped them with depression, discouragement, and gave them unexpected exuberance.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study's findings as they relate to the literature in Chapter Two. This section will include a discussion on empirical and theoretical literature. Since there has been little to no previous literature before this study on Messianic dance, the body of literature had to do with topics that are inherent within Messianic dance; these have to do with body, mind, and spirit. The findings of this study verified that participants had physical benefits, improvement in mood well-being, appreciation for sociological connection, and the sense that God was in their midst. It will elaborate on how this current study adds to the literature and starts building a foundation where there has not been one.

### **Empirical Literature**

This current study on Messianic dance for self-reported relief from symptoms of depression confirmed the literature on self-help and alternative treatments for depression, attachment to the God of Israel, the need for human connection, and the positive effect of physical movement. In addition, this study will add to the body of literature by making a foundation for the topic of Messianic dance.

***Self-help and Alternative Treatments for Depression***

Depression is of global concern (Kella et al., 2021). According to the WHO (2021), 280 million people suffer worldwide. It is the most common form of a psychological disorder (Dadfar et al., 2021) and symptoms can be mild, severe, and anywhere in between. This study's interview was mediated by the post-test questionnaire given after the Messianic dance workshop was completed. The questionnaire was loosely based on both the BDI and the CES-D for reliable self-reporting depression measures. According to Olino et al. (2012), the two most reliable scales are the BDI and the CES-D. It was not established that any of the participants had depression, but based on their responses, all 10 agreed that they felt emotionally and physically better than they did before the class. Carl Jung noted that dance released the unconscious mind (Fourie & Lessing, 2010). He felt that participating in a creative activity evoked liberation (Hancock, 2021). A few of the participants were dealing with some sadness and anxiousness before the class and then had a release: "I went to dance. I forgot everything and that sadness I had was gone" (Consuelo). Delia said, "Before the class I had had an incident with a person before, and I was down, feeling sad, because of what had happened, and coming to dance in the class, it allowed me to forget about it."

Physical activity is related to happiness and mood betterment (Killingback et al., 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2019). "It took the anxiousness away ... My mood would just completely change right then and there. Just thinking about the steps, to put together" (Bella). Campion and Levita (2014) said emotional well-being was influenced by cycling and dancing. Self-help remedies often include exercise (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Alternative remedies include art therapies such as dance, Tai chi, and meditation. According to their questionnaires and their interviews, the 10 participants agreed that dance lifts them up when they feel sad, and it was a positive activity. The

10 participants confirmed the literature on self-help and alternative treatments for depression.

***Attachment to the God of Israel***

Granqvist (2021) explained that Bowlby's attachment theory is a theoretical concept related to human protection with a caregiver's physical nearness. For Jews and Christians who attach themselves to the God of the Bible, it has been shown to bring better mental health (Pirutinsky et al., 2019). This current phenomenological study confirmed the need, desire, and enjoyment of being attached to God the Father. Messianic dance is rooted in the God of Israel, Messianic Judaism, the Bible, and Jewish custom. The participants in this study were either Messianic Believers or Christians. They all had a connection to the God of Israel. In their interviews, all the participants shared how the activity of Messianic dance brought them balance and a deeper union with Him. Some participants felt they were created for Messianic dance: "I really believe that we are created for this, and if I'm my mind, spirit, soul body, and my complete being worshiped in the Lord, this is what I'm created for. I feel very fulfilled" (Hadley Victoria). Delia said, "Just knowing whom I am dancing for – it makes me feel really closer to God. I feel like I'm touching Him, like He's dancing with me."

Nygaard et al.'s (2020) phenomenological study of God attachment included descriptions of healing visions of God, feelings of warmth, being held like a baby in God's hands, hearing His voice, a sense of intimacy with Him, and experiencing waves of His love. James said he experienced shalom,

I wanted to also highlight it gives me peace: higher and deeper experiencing the peace of God. I know that many times in Jewish and Christian circles, people will say the word 'Shalom,' and Shalom is a powerful reality. I definitely experienced it in the Spirit. Several participants spoke in terms of God as a loving father as they experienced the

dance: “I just really feel loved. I am His child even though I’m an old lady. When I dance worship it’s a prayer. It’s a connection with God” (Frances). Delia went on to explain how she felt while dancing,

He is in control of all things, He’s the one that fixes everything. He knows my heart and it helps all of the rest of the areas of my life. I do it for me to get closer to God. I believe He’s there with me. I feel like I’m dancing with my Father, and I know He is with me. He dances with me and it’s just different.

Goldie, who grew up in an abusive family, said she found a different type of relationship through Messianic dance:

I know who I am. And to be able to worship as a Jew, to have that connection where I had no connection, there was no real family. Now I have a heavenly Father, who loves me. It’s like being in the presence of God there’s a touch there.

### ***The Need for Human Connection***

The study in both the post-test questionnaire and the interview confirmed that camaraderie was important and aided in the overall positive experience. All the participants agreed with the statement “I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop.” When asked what was one of the most important aspects of the workshop, their answers were being with others.

Most of the dances were done in a circle while holding hands. According to Taylor et al. (2020), feeling connected to other people is a basic human need that enhances life satisfaction, mitigates the effects of stress, and creates stronger immunity (p. 788). One lady was apprehensive when she first arrived because she did not know anyone. By the end of the workshop, Iris felt differently: “I didn’t know the people that were there except for Andrea, and I

still felt a sense of community with them.” Taylor et al. (2020) state, participating in positive activities is an intervention for depression and enhanced social connectedness. The activities increased positive emotions and decreased negative ones (p. 788). Frances said she almost did not attend because she was “really down.” She said,

I came and just being around others who love the Lord, hearing them talk about how wonderful it is, my being able to talk about who how wonderful He is, praising Him, and I just felt a whole lot better.

Coursey (2021) says one of the keys to having joy is a connection with others or the need for relationships. One participant was touched deeply by the fellowship with one another. James said,

It was a very true experience of being with others, in the presence of God and worshipping God, which makes fellowship very rich and very meaningful; and what I mean by that is, we were experiencing communion in a very deep way as we were worshipping God together.

Studies on social interactions have been effective in decreasing symptoms of depression (Kuchaska, 2018; Mogan et al., 2017; Tarr et al., 2015). Iris said that Messianic dance eliminated the need for antidepressants: “I was on the maximum amount of antidepressants that you could have and sleeping medication. I’m not on any of it, and that was all the Lord and the dancing.”

### ***The Positive Effect of Physical Movement***

Messianic dance has within its constructs synchronized choreography and physical movement. Studies on both variables have been shown to have positive results in people. Mogan et al. (2017) said that synchronicity creates social cohesion and cooperative behavior. Also, it can have a positive effect on bonding and social cognition. One participant especially noted the



importance of synchronous worship. Allison said,

There is something about doing things at the same time. I know that there's something about learning a piece and being able to, especially for worship, to sing together in a way that gives harmony, it's like that with dance I think – Messianic dance. It's a unity in what we're doing.

Tarr et al. (2015) believe that a chemical reaction in the brain takes place when synchronicity happens that influences positive social feelings and creates elevated endorphin levels. "I have clarity. After I participate in Messianic dance, there's a there's a mental clarity" (Bella). Another participant described dancing together as an "elation." Hadley Victoria said,

The fellowship energizes. It's an elation. There's joy and gliding. It's like ice skating where you're gliding, you're flowing, you're alone, but also as a team. There's real strength. We're holding hands. There's a real strengthening with holding hands, being a team, being a family, and being a group.

One of the participants not only felt better physically because of dancing together, but also emotionally and socially. James said,

I feel better physically, emotionally, and socially – like I had more peace. I had more peace in my heart. I felt more connected with the other people, and I felt more connected with God. I also felt the experience of victory. I felt confident in the Lord.

Another participant felt invigorated by the class, and it gave her more energy as it progressed.

Bella said,

It's the exercise that helps your body your heart, but this, is different. Before, I felt really tired with no energy and that's one of the reasons that I didn't want to dance. But as soon as I started, the energy came in and covered me even in the periods that we had the 10-

minute rest. I had the energy to dance more I think it was because spirit of Yahweh was there (Consuelo).

Another participant felt rejuvenated. He said,

I had a heightened sense of learning. I felt stimulated that way, and it made me concentrate. I felt alive. I was tired. I had a long day. After the class and during the class I felt rejuvenated, I felt more awake and not tired anymore. Messianic Dance energizes me, but I feel physically stronger during and after (Ethan).

Battaglia et al. (2015) say that physical exercise affects mood through physiological avenues such as body temperature, adrenal activity, neurotransmission of dopamine, and noradrenaline. “It makes me feel good it’s energizing to me” (Goldie). One participant compared dance to exercise. She said,

I go to Zumba three times a week. I know about the muscles, and I know how you get tired physically when you work out your body. This is not only physical. This is mental and spiritual. It’s emotional. It’s healing. There is no comparison. Because like I said, when I walk, and I walk in the mornings, I enjoy going out and seeing nature. I even pray to the Father in heaven, but this is more intimate. This is something between me and Him, it’s very personal (Delia).

Physical activity is related to happiness (Zhang & Chen, 2019). All of the participants agreed with feeling happy and better than they did before the class. They all knew that it was like exercise but also different. One participant described it as, being similar to exercising and how the body responds, but also inclusive of the manifest presence of God. She said,

I would say it’s some sort of physical activity. I wouldn’t say it’s the same as working out, because when I am running on the treadmill, I don’t feel the Spirit moving like when

I'm dancing in a circle. But I got the same sore muscles. I had sore calves. I was sweaty, we were we're parched from water. It's similar, but the emotion and the connection are different. As well, our hearts worship of the Lord together.

### **Theoretical Literature**

There were several theoretical concepts that directed this study. First, it is a God-driven religious encounter, and religion is an important concept in mental health. It can foster community and healing especially when focused on God (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Chung et al., 2016; Eilami et al., 2019; Ettun et al., 2014). Theme One: God is in the Midst was directly related to this particular concept. All of the participants knew that God was in their midst as they danced. They acknowledged His shalom, His, peace, and His presence. It was also related to Theme Three: There is a Sense of Community. They enjoyed the community aspect of the customs within Messianic Judaism, the Jewish religion and prayers, and Israel.

Second, God Attachment Theory is based on Bowlby's concept of human protection by the caregiver, because people put their trust in God while they danced (Granqvist, 2021; Thomas, 2005). This theoretical concept was also consistent with Theme One: God is in the Midst. Several participants related to God as their loving and heavenly Father as a result of participating in Messianic dance. They felt they were dancing before Him, and they felt Him in their midst while they held hands with one another.

There is also the Biblical concept. There are Biblical examples of worshiping God through dance, the holiness of coming before Him, and His benefits. These include Miriam the Prophetess, King David, The Psalms, Biblical festival sacrifice, and Jesus (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Exodus 15:20-21; Leviticus 23; Psalms 149:3; 150:4; 150:6; 2 Samuel 6:14-22; Judges 21:21; Matthew 11:17). Three of the themes were expressly supported by this concept:

God is in the Midst, People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth, and There is a Sense of Community. All of the participants were followers of the Bible, and the movement progressed them closer to walking out their faith in a deeper way. God's Word speaks of healing, community, and His presence.

Fourth, Carl Jung and Marion Chance's exploration of DMT (Fourie & Lessing, 2010; Robyn, 2018) helped to establish that movement can unlock the unconscious mind; it can change attitudes and create self-awareness. These concepts related to both themes two and four: People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth and Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise. According to the participants' post-test questionnaires after the Messianic dance workshop, all of the responses were positive emotional outcomes. As well, they felt the dance was an energizing, exciting, physical activity.

### **Implications**

The results from this phenomenological study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. The purpose of this section is to describe the three categories of implications and the impact on the following stakeholders: 1) the Biblical researcher interested in further developing a foundation for this topic, self-help exploration, Scriptural physical activity, or complementary therapies for improvements in mood well-being, 2) Christian therapists, ministers, or lay members interested in Scriptural activities of the Bible or facilitating a ministry that draws from the Scriptures, and 3) groups and individuals who want a Scripturally based physical activity.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

This study provided results that have theoretical implications for researchers who are intrigued by building on the foundation of Messianic dance and are interested in Biblical-based

self-help or complementary therapies for mood well-being, alleviating self-reported symptoms of depression, and Scriptural physical exercise. As discussed in previous sections, there has been little research on Messianic dance. All the participants in this study, by both their post-test questionnaires after the workshop and their interviews, demonstrated they experienced benefit; they found value. Until now, DMT, creative art therapies, prayer, religious community, and physical exercises, are well documented for the treatment of self-reported symptoms of depression and overall mood betterment. There are limited Christian-based complementary therapies outside of counseling, which address the needs of the Believer, especially those who are in the Messianic movement. There are many Scriptures in the above sections that support Messianic dance not only in the act itself, but for God's presence, healing, community, and physical exercise. It would be appropriate for the Biblical researcher to investigate Biblical dancing. The sections before gave examples of the patriarch, matriarchs, and other biblical figures demonstrating the act of dancing. As well, many Scriptures support dancing in both the Tanach and New Covenants.

Theoretical implications for Christian counselors, ministers, or lay members interested in facilitating a ministry that draws from the Scriptures are positive. Many people want to be involved in a biblical activity that is beneficial. Messianic dance utilizes properties that are beneficial to people such as prayer, Bible Scripture, religious tradition, fellowship, and physical exercise. There are people who prefer to speak with Christian counselors or pastors for support rather than secular individual for many reasons including stigma. The same may be said about traditional activities to relieve stress and would rather give communal expression in a faith-based activity.

Finally, there are theoretical implications for the group or individual who want to be

involved in a Spiritually based activity. All of the participants in the study stated that being with others in the dance circle was a powerful way to express their love for God. They felt connected to God through the community aspects of the activity of dance. They all felt that it was a type of exercise but different because of the Holy Spirit, who was present with them.

### **Empirical Implications**

This study provides several empirical implications for researchers. Since this is the first study of Messianic dance it will begin a foundation of which there was not any. It was clear that people felt emotionally and physically better after the workshop, according to their post-test questionnaires and interviews. Currently, there is research on related topics such as the benefits of DMT for the relief of depression and trauma (Acolin, 2016; Bajekal, 2021; Brauning, 2012; Dieterich-Hartwell, 2017; Fourie & Lessing, 2010; Gordon, 2014; Hancock, 2021; Karkou et al., 2019; Koch et al., 2019; Kronsted, 2020; Levine & Land, 2016; Robyn, 2018). There is nothing using the genre of Messianic dance. There is also research on prayers, meditation, mindfulness, and religion for mental health (Bosco-Ruggiero, 2020; Eilami et al., 2019; Heath & Cutrer-Párraga, 2020; Kuchaska, 2018; Ijaz et al., 2017; Starnino, 2016). All of these are inherent within Messianic dance. There is also research on synchronicity and exercise. These include running and other sports, such as Pilates, Yoga, weightlifting, and Tai chi (Battaglia et al., 2015; Brush et al., 2020; Champion & Levita, 2014; Cole et al., 2021/2022; Fink et al., 2021; Killingback et al., 2022; Mogan et al., 2017; Novak & Ellis, 2021/2022; Özkan et al., 2020; Saltan & Ankaralı, 2021; Tarr et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2014; Zhang & Chen, 2019). People experienced the benefit of physical exercise with the added additions of God. Research could be enlarged in this area. Currently, there is research on Messianic Judaism (Abramovich, 2009/2011; Ariel, 2016; Rudolph, 2016; Oliver, 2016). However, outside of listing it as an activity at some Messianic

congregations, it did not describe Messianic dance. There was a book by a Messianic leader defining Messianic dance (Silberling, 1995), but until this phenomenological study, there has not been any exploration.

For stakeholders who are Christian counselors, ministers, or lay members interested in Scriptural activities of the Bible or facilitating a ministry that draws from the Scriptures, empirical implications are important. Every participant experienced a sense of God being in their midst, the important aspect of community, some sort of healing either: physical, emotional, spiritual, or a combination of each. In addition, they thought the activity was different from secular exercise. It was exciting and energizing. They connected to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Scriptures support the physical activity of Messianic dance in areas of praise, holiness, spiritual warfare, and God's presence (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 10:27; Matthew 11:17; 18:20; Exodus 15:20-21; Leviticus 23; Psalms 149:3; 150:4; 150:6; 2 Samuel 6:14-22; Judges 21:21).

For the participants in the study, Messianic dance is a part of their lives with many benefits. Physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Some attribute the activity to the transformation of their lives. All felt it was a different experience than a secular exercise.

### **Practical Implications**

This current phenomenological study has practical implications for all stakeholders. Since this is the first of any kind of study in this genre, there is a need to expand the literature. For the researcher, both Biblical and secular, there is an opportunity to make contributions in the area of Messianic dance. The Biblical researcher can explore how the patriarchs and matriarchs participate especially as it relates to Scripture. Secular researchers can further examine the activity of Messianic dance because inherently within its enactment, there have been studies that

have generated results for mental health.

This study has practical implications for Christian therapists, ministers, lay members of Christian congregations, groups, and individuals. All the participants agreed they felt better than they did before the class. They all said the dance lifts them up when they feel sad. They all felt that it was exciting, energizing, gave clarity, and helped them enjoy their job more. They agreed that it was a positive exercise; they enjoyed the fellowship with others and were happy with people. It is a biblical physical activity, and they sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit. Several described His shalom and felt closer to Israel and the Jewish people. Many can learn from the 10 participants of this study. The following are recommendations for those who would like to dance or incorporate their own Messianic dance ministry:

- Find and visit a Messianic dance class in your area at a local Messianic congregation.
- Commit to attending several sessions as well as the services at the Messianic congregation.

If you would like to incorporate dance at your congregation:

- Purchase a good quality Messianic dance curriculum to learn the dances.
- Support is needed. Ask and pray with the leadership about incorporating a Messianic dance class at the congregation or fellowship.
- Make sure you have a private space to dance in, music, and a sound system.
- Begin and end each class with prayer.
- Connect the dance to Scripture with an application.

### **Christian Worldview**

This study was based on Messianic dance which is an outgrowth of the Messianic Jewish movement: Jewish people who have come to accept Jesus as their promised Messiah. Nine



participants were non-Jewish believers in Jesus. There was one Jewish believer. All of the participants shared about sensing the presence of God in their midst while dancing. Though completely supported Scripturally, it is relatively unknown by the greater Christian Body of Messiah. Hopefully, this study will add to its credibility.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

It is important for the researcher to report the study's delimitations and limitations. The purpose of this is to inform the reader of why decisions were made in the construction of the study. This includes why boundaries were put in place by the researcher. The delimitation and limitations section adds to the accuracy, transparency, and reliability of the research. It will also inform the reader about future research.

#### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are intentional decisions put in place by the researcher to define the boundaries of the study. Since this was the first study on the phenomenon of Messianic dance, this researcher chose to have participants who had at least five encounters participating in it. There are many factors in the physical activity of Messianic dance, having a participant who has experienced it before, eliminated the possibility of being overwhelmed, and allowed them to articulate their lived experience. Also, it was important to have a minimum age of 18 in place for the same reason and omit the need for permission by a parent or guardian. To ensure the study would acquire participants in a timely fashion, the dance camp venue was optimal. Also, the decision to have the interviews on the Zoom platform allowed everyone to participate, the interview to be video recorded, and include written transcription.

#### **Limitations**

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) define the limitations of a study as weaknesses that may

influence the outcome of the study. Many times, this is beyond the researcher's control.

However, it is ethical to list the limitation. It ensures the study's transparency and hopefully will leave the reader with opportunities to engage in improvements from the gap in the literature for the future. This study had several limitations. First, qualitative studies cannot be truly replicated as in a controlled study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). All the participants had previous experiences with Messianic dance; the interviews were based partly on the post-test questionnaire. This may have hindered their lived experience by qualifying their interview with the questionnaire.

Second, all the participants were homogeneous; they had all participated in dance at least five times and they were believers in Jesus. Though most Messianic dance camps are made up of believers, it would be interesting if the data included lived experiences of non-believers. Third, all of the interviews were based partly on the post-test questionnaire. It may have hindered their lived experience by qualifying their interview with the questionnaire.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. Based on the findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study there are recommendations for future research on this topic. This was done to establish a foundation. Future research could involve those experiencing it for the first time and different aspects of the themes.

All of the participants had previous experience with Messianic dance and they were all believers in Yeshua. Future research studies are not limited. It could involve the same process including participants experiencing it for the first time to see what their lived experience is using a qualitative design and interview without the post-test questionnaire. Participants may have felt

limited in sharing only what they listed on the post-test. Another research study could use many subjects who attended a dance workshop. They would be given a post-test that would be quantitative in nature that would find out particulars as they pertained to the research question.

Regarding all of the themes that the findings of this study revealed, there is an opportunity for future research on Messianic dance in the areas of sensing God's presence, healing, community, and exercise. All of the participants experienced God's presence while they danced. In a future study, it would be feasible to quantify the results on a Likert scale. This would include how much the participants feel aspects of the Holy Spirit such as His peace, Fatherly love, and His Kingship. A study on the healing attributes of Messianic dance that include the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects could be an area of research. Again, this would be appropriate to do quantitatively with a larger numbered sample. At the end of the dance workshop, a post-test would be given with a Likert scale. These could be singular studies for each area. For mental health and depression, a study could be done on the community aspects of Messianic dance. This could either be done by a qualitative case study of an individual or a group. It would be facilitated by a behavioral researcher. Finally, future research could be done on the aspect of exercise and depression. This would be to find out if Messianic dance alleviates feelings of depression. This could either be qualitative or quantitative. Of course, there is no limit.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe participants' experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. By using this method of transcendental phenomenology, 10 participants were able to fully describe their lived experience and the many blessings they received while they danced. As a result, four main themes and 13 sub-themes

emerged.

The first main theme was God is in the Midst. All of the participants shared and gave examples of when they danced; they experienced His presence. Participants described two sub-themes. The first was the Holy Spirit Connection. They sensed His peace, shalom, and presence, and they could see Him by watching others dance. The second subtheme was It is Like Dancing with the Heavenly Father. Participants described this aspect as wanting to give Him their excellence and having hope for the future.

The second main theme was People Feel Better: Healing Goes Forth. All participants described some type of healing through four subthemes. The first was The Questionnaire. All of the participants circled “Agree” on 10 of 11 statements. The second subtheme was Emotional. The participants’ interviews and the questionnaires supported the circled statements. The statements the participants agreed with were: Messianic dance lifts me up if I feel sad; Messianic dance is exciting; I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop; Messianic dance allows me to enjoy my job more; participation in messianic dance helps my sleep; participation in Messianic dance is positive; I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance; I have clarity after I participate in Messianic dance; I feel happy with people after I participate in Messianic dance; and, I feel better than I did before the class. The third sub-theme was Physical. Some participants gave descriptions of physical healing. The fourth sub-theme was Spiritual, and all had some aspect of this sub-theme to share.

The third main theme was There is A Sense of Community. This was something all of the participants described. In the area of the sub-theme Camaraderie, they said that Messianic dance was fun, and it was powerful to hold hands. The sub-theme of Synchronicity provided an aspect of unity. The subtheme of Messianic Judaism brought participants closer to Israel, Jewish

customs, and the Jewish people.

The fourth main theme was Messianic Dance is a Type of Exercise, and the sub-themes recounted by the participants included that it definitely was a Physical Activity. It was completely Energizing because even if they came to the class tired they felt invigorated as they danced. They also brought out the subtheme of It is Exciting in their description. Finally, they all gave reasons that it was Different than Secular Exercise because the focus is on God, and He is there.

There was no previous research on Messianic dance, only topics that are inherently within Messianic dance. These include self-help and alternative treatments for depression, attachment to the God of Israel, the need for human connection, and the positive effect of physical movement. Up until now, there has been a lack of literature on the topic of Messianic dance. This current study is helping to lay a foundation where there has not been one.

This study has implications for stakeholders: (a) the Biblical researcher interested in further developing a foundation for this topic, self-help exploration, Scriptural physical activity, or complementary therapies for improvements in mood well-being, (b) Christian therapists, ministers, or lay members interested in Scriptural activities of the Bible or facilitating a ministry that draws from the Scriptures, and (c) groups and individuals who want a Scriptural based physical activity.

King David and Miriam danced before the Lord in reverential joy. They, like others in the Bible, had experienced hardship and travail. Yet, they praised His name. The Scriptures declare that everything that has breath should praise the Lord, and to praise Him in the dance (*ESV Bible*, 2001/2016, Psalm 149; 150). We should too.

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**APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 3, 2023

Mindy Seta  
Walter Thomas

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-588 Messianic Dance for Self-reported Relief from Symptoms of Depression: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Mindy Seta, Walter Thomas,

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

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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 [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

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

**APPENDIX B: Consent Form****Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** Messianic Dance for Self-reported Relief from Symptoms of Depression: A Phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Mindy M. Seta, M.A. Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be at least 18 years of age or older, have attended the Messianic dance workshop, and participated at least 5 times in Messianic dance. 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 project.

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

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe participant's experiences in a Messianic dance workshop.

**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. Complete a short 10- minute post-questionnaire after the dance workshop.
2. Within two weeks you will have a 60-minute one-on-one interview over a Zoom meeting. It will be audio and video-recorded and transcribed.

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

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the study could be significant to the scientific community. Up to this time, there has been no research on Messianic dance and its inherent properties.

**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.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- 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.

- 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.
- Zoom interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**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 is Mindy Seta. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or email: [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Walter Thomas, at [REDACTED].

**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, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**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 and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

**APPENDIX C: Study Questionnaire****Please Complete this Questionnaire After you Complete the Dance Camp**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation in our dance camp. We are always looking for ways to improve the dance camp experience. Please help us evaluate and improve our dance camp ministry by carefully completing this questionnaire. We are interested in whether you may have experienced some personal benefits or changes because of participating in this dance camp. Please feel free to write additional thoughts and suggestions on the back.

Based on This Class Please Circle Agree or Disagree for Each Statement.

- |  |       |          |
|--|-------|----------|
| 1. Messianic dance lifts me up if I feel sad.  | Agree | Disagree |
| 2. Messianic dance is exciting.  | Agree | Disagree |
| 3. Messianic dance is good for my eating habits.                                       | Agree | Disagree |
| 4. I enjoy fellowship with others at a Messianic dance workshop.                       | Agree | Disagree |
| 5. Messianic dance allows me to enjoy my job more.                                     | Agree | Disagree |
| 6. Participation in Messianic dance helps my sleep.                                    | Agree | Disagree |
| 7. Participation in Messianic dance is positive.                                       | Agree | Disagree |
| 8. I get energized when I participate in Messianic dance.                              | Agree | Disagree |
| 9. I have clarity after I participate in Messianic dance.                              | Agree | Disagree |
| 10. I feel happy with people after I participate in Messianic dance.                   | Agree | Disagree |
| 11. I feel better than I did before the class.   | Agree | Disagree |
| 12. Please share any other thoughts you may have about the dance workshop on the back. |       |          |



**APPENDIX D: Screening Recruitment Script**

Hello {Potential Participant},

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe participant's experiences in a Messianic dance workshop. The research questions will be focused on understanding how you, the participant, felt during and after the Messianic dance workshop? If you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be over 18 years of age and have completed the dance workshop. Participants will then complete a short post-questionnaire after the dance workshop. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a video recorded interview via Zoom that will last up to 60 minutes. The meeting will be transcribed, and pseudonyms will be used in all written work.

Would you like to participate? [Yes] Great! Are you over 18? [Yes} After the dance camp I will give you the short post-questionnaire to complete.

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Would you like to take part in the Zoom interview [No] I understand. Thank you for your time.

{Yes} A consent document will be given to you before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me through the mail before the interview. Thank you so much. Do you have any questions?

**APPENDIX E: Screening Questions**

1. What is your name?
2. Are you over 18?
3. Have you participated in Messianic dance before?
4. If yes, more than five times?

**APPENDIX F: Interview Questions**

(These questions will be based on the participants' surveys.)

1. I know we have met, but how did you hear about the dance workshop?
2. Would you tell me why you came to the dance workshop?
3. You mentioned on your post questionnaire that you had recently experienced (name some of the answers) before the Messianic dance workshop. Would you tell me about that?
4. How did you feel while you were participating in the Messianic dance workshop?
5. Would you tell me about what you described on the back of the questionnaire?

**Possible Additional Probing Questions**

1. Would you please tell me more about that?
2. When you described that portion, you mentioned a word, expound on that?

**APPENDIX G: Mindy's Journal/Epoche****March 19, 2023, 6:18PM - Interview with Allison**

As I am waiting for Allison to log on, I am noticing I am nervous. I do not enjoy speaking with people. It is different when I teach dance. I am questioning about two things. First the questionnaire. And then how they experienced the dance camp. I am surprised that she agreed with all the questions. I was surprised by her response to my first question on why she came to the dance camp. She was there to encourage another congregant in her dance leading and to find some dances to songs the congregation sings. Though I was listening to her responses. I had thoughts that she was quite cerebral. I was glad that I had the tool of journaling. I felt some relief after it was over because it was the first.

Points that stood out:

- Dance helps to connect with Israel and the Culture
- Dance is exciting, precious, and lovely.
- Community aspect and synchronicity.
- Camaraderie was fun the worship was like a bonus.

**March 20, 2023, 3:59PM – Interview with Bella**

I feel a little more relaxed because now I have done it and I find myself thinking about how I can solicit the participant to talk more. Again, she marked all the questions “Agree” on the post test, except the one about eating. I am perplexed. I’m thinking about future studies to hone-in on this more aspect more and wonder if this type of dance really affected the participants as greatly as it says. I will try and frame my questions better. When Bella came on, I noticed her persona is bubblier and less cerebral than the last. In drawing out her responses I have to stop cutting her off. She is giving great description. I felt drawn to ask her if it was the same as other physical activity. Points that stood out:

- She liked our dance demonstration.
- She felt the Holy Spirit connection and pray while dancing.
- She felt emotionally and physically different (goosebumps).
- Being with other people.
- She felt there was a great difference and gave good examples.

**March 20, 2023, 4:32PM – Interview with Consuelo**

I feel a bit anxious that she will be able to log-on and that the recording is able to pick up her accent. I am hoping I can draw out her rich experience.

Points that stood out:

- She was not going to dance because she did not feel good before.
- She decided to and felt better.
- She felt energized.
- Liked seeing men and women dancing.

**March 21, 2023, 7:30AM – Interview with Delia**

I am looking forward to Delia's interview and she is available earlier. I felt a connection with her at the dance workshop she was the acting dance leader. I sent everyone a copy of their questionnaire, but she doesn't have it available. So I am having to read the statements to her. I am happy she is so expressive and detailed in her experience. It is fascinating to hear that she had some kind of an emotional incident happen just before the camp and the dance lifted her out of it. She is becoming emotional as she reflects on dancing unto Him. As I am listening to her it sounds like my experience. Yet, this is hers not mine.

- The dance is different than exercise.
- It is physical, mental, spiritual, emotional healing. There is no comparison.
- She gave a powerful testimony of her physical healing through this type of dance.

#### **March 21, 2023, 10:57AM Interview with Ethan**

This will be the first man I interview, and though he is a good friend I am wondering if he will give his experience in depth like the women. We are having some technical difficulties and he is only giving one-line answers. Points that stood out:

- It is exciting because it uses my whole being: mind, body, and spirit.
- I felt stimulated and alive while in the class.
- I was tired before the class and I felt rejuvenated.
- The worship made me interact with the Lord and become stronger physically.
- The worship makes me want to be excellent in my movements doing it unto the Lord.
- He is worthy of my best.
- When I feel sad or worrying, when I dance it puts things in perspective.

#### **March 21, 2023, 1:44 PM - Interview with Frances**

I am looking forward to this interview because she was so happy to be included in this study. I am hoping she will login with no problems. She is able to express herself well, but she says she is unable to. Points that stood out:

- It lifts her up when she feels down.
- She enjoys being with other believers.
- I feel happier with people after dancing.
- I feel loved and like a child of God when I dance.

#### **March 22, 2023, 9:39AM – Interview with Goldie**

I am glad that she is doing this interview. She is very expressive and uses her hands. She is on the floor near her bed speaking. She is expressive and quite. She goes off on rabbit hole sot explain herself. Main points:

- Dance is a huge part of her life. She must dance to express herself.
- Her Jewish culture is important to her.
- Her Messianic Jewish identity is in her dance.
- She has come through abuse and dance has helped.

#### **March 23, 2023, 1:50PM – Interview with Hadley Victoria**

I feel like I am getting the hang of it now. I feel more confident. We started a bit early she was ready to begin. She seems confident too, like she is going to have a great deal to say. Main points:

- Lifts me up.
- The fellowship aspect is important.
- It energizes me.

**March 24, 2023, 7:00 AM – Interview with Iris**

Iris was at the dance camp and remembered me from years ago. I cannot remember her. She has come through much so perhaps that is why. She met the qualifications to participate in the study and so I am hoping she is able to get online. I am excited also and not afraid to do this part of the study anymore. I am hoping that she will be able to contribute good detail. Main points:

- She experienced physical and emotional healing. She attributes it to Messianic dance.
- Feels her life changed because of it.
- All the aspects of the questionnaire are important to her.

**March 27, 2023, 5:43:AM – Interview with James**

I am happy because this is the last interview, and it is with another man. He likes to talk, and I am hoping I will be able to redirect the conversation if I need to. He and his wife hosted the dance workshop we had. He was focused but he took long pauses. He shared that people had a hard time with him because he talks so much. I felt sad for him, but he was happy because the dance camp addressed that for him. Main points:

- He experienced God's presence, anointing, and shalom.
- He felt energized and after and prepared for the long journey he is going to take.
- The fellowship and communion with people was important because he has felt marginalized.
- It was a highlight for him.