

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Building Bridges: Connecting the Disconnected to God and Others after Counseling

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT REPORT ABSTRACT

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Previous research reveals that building bridges is not a new concept, but most of these topics do not involve the combination of relationships and counseling. Building Bridges is a metaphor for building healthy relationships. All participants were willing volunteers and were ensured anonymity. Twenty-three participants signed up for the workshop, and nineteen received a certificate of completion. The inspection report questionnaire and self-reflection homework assignment were used to introduce some vital tools for spiritual journaling, self-accountability, and self-assessment for each participant. The problem at FBC-GA is the relational disconnection caused by shame, guilt, and unresolved hurt that remains an inward conflict even after counseling. The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry action research project is to formulate and implement the Building Bridges workshop at FBC-GA, equipping the disconnected with skills for healthy relationships. The controlling idea behind Building Bridges is if members at FBC-GA engage in the Building Bridges workshop, then the rebuilding process will bridge the interpersonal gaps, crossing from relational disconnection to connection. The research from this study was used to form the PowerPoint presentation and workbook used in the Building Bridges workshop for the willing participants at FBC-GA.

Keywords: Love, Trust, Hope, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Dissociation, Rumination

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Abbreviations

CRBA	<i>Catawba River Baptist Association</i>
FBC-GA	<i>First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine</i>
NCDOT	<i>North Carolina Department of Transportation</i>
PTSD	<i>Post-traumatic stress disorder</i>
SBC	<i>Southern Baptist Convention</i>
VBS	<i>Vacation Bible School</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

God created mankind with a need for connection through relationships. The cycle of life consists of connection, disconnection, and repair, which are essential for continual growth and development.¹ Problems in the cycle of life begin to develop when individuals experience prolonged disconnections due to unresolved hurt that turns healthy relationships into unhealthy relationships characterized by secrecy, isolation, withdrawal, and dissociation. The Building Bridges workshop is intended to instruct, inspire, and equip members of the First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine (FBC-GA) to build healthy relationships.

Ministry Context

The local ministry context for this Doctor of Ministry action research thesis is FBC-GA. FBC-GA is a small community church nestled in the foothills of North Carolina. The church affiliation is Southern Baptist and partners with the sixty-eight churches of the Catawba River Baptist Association (CRBA). FBC-GA has positively influenced the town of Glen Alpine and the surrounding area for more than 140 years. This researcher is currently the senior pastor at FBC-GA and gained permission and full support from the deacon board and church members to complete the action research project.

Demographics of Glen Alpine

The Village of Turkey Tail, North Carolina, was established in 1868 but went through a few name changes before being incorporated as the Town of Glen Alpine Station in 1883 and then Glen Alpine in 1896. This date of 1883 is significant because the church was incorporated

¹ George Faller and Heather P. Wright, *True Connection: Using the NAME IT Model to Heal Relationships*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 2.

in 1882, which establishes the church's presence in the town of Glen Alpine at its inception. Glen Alpine is a small rural community located eight miles west of downtown Morganton and fifteen miles east of Marion. The 2020 census revealed a population of 1,872 within a 2.1 square mile radius, which equals 871.9 people per square mile, and a median age of 38.1; 61% of residents are between 18 to 64.² Homeownership is at 76.1%, the median property value is \$135,900, and the median household income is \$39,550.³ An average of 2.8 persons live in each of the 660 households in Glen Alpine, and 68% of these households are headed by married couples. Most working residents of Glen Alpine are high school graduates, with 20.9% of residents having obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴ The racial composition of Glen Alpine is mostly White (86.87%), while the remainder of the population identifies as two or more races (5.45%), Asian (2.8%), Black or African American (2.65%), and other races (1.92%).⁵ Glen Alpine's diversity has increased over the past two years, which will be evident in the next census.

Glen Alpine has experienced a decline in population over the years due to the loss of furniture manufacturing and textile jobs in the area. The population decline has not only affected the community but also the churches. Only one church in Glen Alpine has experienced significant growth over the past two decades. The demographics of Glen Alpine can be misleading. Many of the residents of Glen Alpine use a Morganton postal address with a different zip code within the Glen Alpine township. Morganton is considered an urban

² "Glen Alpine, NC," U.S. Census Bureau, Census Reporter., accessed May 16, 2023, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3726200-glen-alpine-nc/>.

³ "Glen Alpine, NC," DATAUSA, accessed May 15, 2023, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/glen-alpine-nc>.

⁴ "Glen Alpine, North Carolina Population 2023," World Population Review, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/glen-alpine-nc-population>.

⁵ Ibid.

community which strips Glen Alpine of its rural status.

The building a bridge metaphor is especially relevant for the members of FBC-GA and residents of Glen Alpine because this action research project was conducted concurrently with the building of a bridge over Interstate 40 at Causby Road by contractors chosen by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). This project was not a repair of the existing bridge but a removal and replacement of spalling concrete, approach slabs, and decking. The construction was expected to take six months.⁶ The NCDOT's planning of the project, hiring of work crews, and estimating a time of completion reveals that one person cannot build the bridge and that it takes time to build a bridge. This six-month project reminds the FBC-GA church members that there will be many detours, disconnects, and inconveniences when building relationships and that building relationships, just like bridges, takes time. This new construction transforms the inward heart, a necessity for building healthy relationships.

Demographics of FBC-GA

FBC-GA is one of the oldest churches in the CRBA and has a rich tradition of music, preaching, and community involvement. FBC-GA is the only Southern Baptist church in the Glen Alpine area, but the church gathers every fifth Sunday with the other churches in the community for a night of worship, with each church serving as the host on a rotating basis. The church operated at near capacity for almost two decades, from the mid-1970s through the late-1980s, but the church has seen a drastic drop in attendance over the past twenty years. The majority of the current regular attendees at FBC-GA are senior citizens and residents of Glen Alpine.

⁶ "Major Construction Closing Bridge Over I-40 in Burke County," North Carolina Department of Transportation, April 21, 2023, <https://www.ncdot.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/2023/2023-04-21-i-40-bridge-burke.aspx>.

The church and the town's elementary school are adjacent to each other; this proximity has provided a great mission field for over forty years. The church has continually supported various mission projects in the community, provided volunteers for community events, and participated in CRBA meetings and events. FBC-GA has formed an unofficial alliance with the other community churches to serve the Glen Alpine community better. This partnership involves monthly pastoral gatherings, support of a local food pantry, and various programs throughout the year to bring the gospel to the community. FBC-GA is an Acts 1:8 church that supports local, national, and foreign missions.

Historically, retired military members have played a major role in the church's functioning. The highest percentage of veterans currently attending FBC-GA and served during wartime was in the Vietnam War. This percentage of military veterans at FBC-GA is slightly elevated compared to that of the town, which was 44% in the 2020 census.⁷ Another contributing factor to the elevated percentage of FBC-GA veterans who served during the Vietnam War is that some of the veterans who attend FBC-GA have moved out of the township or live outside the township but still attend the church. Conversely, 38.67% of veterans in Glen Alpine served during the First Gulf War, a much higher percentage than the church.⁸ This is an indication of an older congregation of veterans at FBC-GA. Veterans were an important part of this action research project because of their experience in leadership and strategic planning as well as their attention to detail. FBC-GA veterans also understand the importance of teamwork. These are great qualities for building bridges of healthy relationships at FBC-GA.

⁷ "Glen Alpine, North Carolina Population 2023," World Population Review.

⁸ Ibid.

Programs at FBC-GA

One of the longest-running programs at FBC-GA is the annual Vacation Bible School (VBS). The efforts by church members during VBS have influenced many children and led to many decisions for Christ over the years. Many older residents of Glen Alpine who are not members of FBC-GA remember participating in VBS at FBC-GA when they were children over forty years ago. Segregation has not been an issue during VBS, as both Black and White children have attended since its conception. The diversity in Glen Alpine has changed only minimally over the years as the church remains predominately White. Still, a welcoming spirit to all who attend VBS has been consistently present. FBC-GA's VBS has changed its format to a one-day outdoor event generally held on Saturdays for several years recently due to the pandemic, but VBS returned to its original full-week format in 2023.

Bible studies are mostly conducted during Sunday School and Wednesday night services. Sunday school has been a vital part of the church and remains one of the primary sources of biblical teaching. Wednesday night is designated for prayer time and Bible studies focusing on exhorting, inspiring, and teaching believers through the Scriptures. Discipleship classes are typically offered to new converts and new members on Monday nights and extend for about ten weeks per cycle. The discipleship class was postponed during the pandemic and has not been properly reinstated in the church. The implementation of this class and continual discipleship is crucial for spiritual growth and evangelism that aligns with Christ's teaching in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

The Sunday morning service at FBC-GA allows the congregants to worship through songs. The songs from the choir, hymnals, and special music set the tone for the message. The motto of the church for the past eight years has been "FBC-GA where God is not only good, but

God is great and greatly to be praised.” Sunday morning attendance dropped to about forty percent of normal during the COVID-19 pandemic. The church remained open as usual during the pandemic except for two weeks when the service was held outside in the parking lot. The church had already begun to use Facebook Live before the pandemic, so the transition to live feed services was already in place. The church temporarily added a live feed for Wednesday night Bible study from the pastor’s desk. The pandemic restrictions implemented by the church for Sunday night services, Wednesday night services, and church activities, which included homecoming, the Thanksgiving meal for the community, and monthly fellowships, were lifted in the spring of 2022.

The post-COVID-19 Sunday morning attendance at FBC-GA is around sixty percent of the attendance before 2021. The numbers have not changed much since 2021, but the demographics are beginning to see a shift. The most significant change is the increase in the number of children attending the morning service from 2021 to 2024. The number of children attending children’s church on Sunday mornings has increased by nearly fifty percent. On the other hand, the number of senior adults attending the Sunday morning service at FBC-GA has decreased by approximately twenty-five percent, primarily due to health-related obstacles or death.

Congregation’s Culture

FBC-GA members align with *The Baptist Faith and Message* of 1963 adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).⁹ The members believe in an inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God that is the church's source of truth and authority. The constitution and bylaws that govern the church are biblically rooted statements of fundamental beliefs. These basic beliefs

⁹ “Baptist Faith and Message, 1963,” Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963, <https://bfm.sbc.net/>.

and the Holy Spirit set the direction for the church according to FBC-GA's church covenant, but disconnection still exists within the church. Bullying, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other trauma-related incidents may be new to the church and pastoral counseling. Still, disconnections and hidden hurts that cause shame, guilt, and bitterness, which lead to secrecy, withdrawal, dissociation, and unhealthy relationships, have deprived the members of FBC-GA of healthy relationships throughout its history.

Maintaining healthy relationships can be challenging for the members of any church, and the disconnection caused by unresolved hurt is problematic in relationship-building. FBC-GA is not the only church that has experienced prolonged disconnections among members and a need for healthy relationships, and that need for healthy relationships goes beyond the walls of the church. The focus of this action research project at FBC-GA is not the debris left behind by hurt, trauma, and emotional stress but building new, healthy relationships with God and others so that the church can become an Ephesians 4:7-16 model church and be more effective in reaching others outside the church.

Problem Presented

Connection and disconnection are standard in every relationship, but prolonged disconnection due to relational scars or past hurt often results in withdrawal, isolation, secrecy, and dissociation. Prolonged disconnect is detrimental to both personal and spiritual relationships. Personal disconnection can be present in marital, family, and non-religious relationships. On the other hand, spiritual disconnection affects one's relationship with God, worship, and relationship and fellowship with other Christians. The combination of personal and spiritual relationships is the backbone of the church because God did not intend for believers to worship alone, just as a bridge cannot be built alone.

A multitude of books have been written concerning healthy churches, yet many churches continue to remain unhealthy. A church ignoring relational disconnection is like the NCDOT ignoring the repairs needed on a bridge flagged by an engineer's inspection report. The repairs will be costly and time-consuming, but they are necessary for further use of the bridge; the same principle applies to relationships. Eventually, repairs will not be sufficient to maintain a bridge, and a new one must be constructed. New bridges and new relationships take time to build. These new bridges and new relationships are built one step at a time because relationship changes happen incrementally.¹⁰ No bridge construction starts by putting in the last connecting piece (i.e., the central span), and no healthy relationship can be built by skipping steps or taking shortcuts. In bridge construction, a solid foundation must first be laid that can bear the weight of the structure, and in healthy relationships, that foundation is the love of Jesus Christ. A bridge with a poor foundation cannot withstand the wind, storms, or weight, nor can relationships withstand the storms of life (i.e., trauma, trials, or sin) with a poor foundation (Matt 7:24-27).

There are a plethora of books about "helping the hurting," plenty of interventions and strategies, and readily available counseling for those hurting from traumatic events, depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc., but many FBC-GA church members remain disconnected in their relationships long after completing counseling. The relational hurts of the past are intentionally or unintentionally hidden, hindering current relationships, both personal and spiritual, at FBC-GA. The hurt from shame, guilt, anger, and bitterness from past traumatic experiences can fester inside individuals yet are often hidden by one's outward appearance. The longer the inward hurt remains, the further disconnected individuals at FBC-GA will become, eventually leading to relational withdrawal, isolation, and dissociation. The problem at FBC-GA is relational

¹⁰ Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021), 204.

disconnection caused by shame, guilt, and unresolved hurt continues as an inward emotional conflict even after individuals attend counseling.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry action research project is to formulate and implement the Building Bridges workshop at FBC-GA to equip disconnected individuals with skills for healthy relationships. The problem that has festered at FBC-GA is members' difficulty building personal and spiritual relationships even after counseling. Therefore, this workshop was intended to build a bridge of personal and spiritual relationships that will be maintained for a lifetime by addressing the source and the results of disconnection.

The need to connect the disconnected even after counseling does not reflect negatively on the participants in this action research project or FBC-GA but rather reveals a reality that no matter where one resides, regardless if a person is Christian or non-Christian, and regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity everyone experiences disconnection.¹¹ George Faller and Heather P. Wright contend, "Disconnection is the red light that inhibits the flow of connection."¹² The Fall (Gen 3) introduced the disconnection of mankind with God and created the need for connection. This disconnection with God produced by the sinful nature of man directly affects one's personal and spiritual relationships. The disconnection of mankind will always exist and will often be a cycle of disconnect and connection throughout one's life, but disconnection can be repaired. This repair begins by connecting the disconnected by focusing on bridging the gap between prolonged disconnection and healthy relationships.

¹¹ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

The Building Bridges workshop uses a metaphor of building a bridge to illustrate the relationship-building process. Building a bridge involves completing an initial, making a blueprint, building the new construction, completing a final inspection, and maintaining the structure after completion. This workshop can help members at FBC-GA establish and maintain new, healthy relationships through the process of building bridges. While the workshop is intended for the members at FBC-GA, the long-term goal is for the workshop to serve as a springboard for an additional workshop on healthy relationships and healthy churches that would be available to the churches of the CRBA. The Building Bridges workshop is not intended to provide denominational teaching on healthy relationships. The vision behind this workshop is to provide a structured program that can be implemented by the churches in the Glen Alpine community. Regardless of denomination, every church needs to be healthy, which can only be achieved by building bridges of healthy relationships.

Basic Assumptions

This action research thesis was completed from a biblical worldview of constructing healthy relationships within the church and assumed that most individuals participating in the action research project are Christians and active members of FBC-GA. This action research thesis assumed that all members of FBC-GA have dealt with disconnection at some level because everyone deals with disconnection. The assumption can be made that those members who have gone through counseling are dealing with some trauma, loss, or hurt in their lives. The intended outcome of the workshop is the formation of new, healthy relationships and not to identify those who have been counseled or hurt regardless of the disconnection or hurt one might be encountering.

This action research project assumed full use of FBC-GA facilities, full support from the deacons, and a commitment from the church members to faithfully attend the workshop. This research project assumed that each member who attended the workshop would participate in any surveys or work studies needed to secure the research data. The action research project participants volunteered their time and engagement, and it was assumed that everyone who attended and participated did so out of their own free will.

Definitions

This Building Bridges project concerns itself primarily with the ministry at FBC-GA. This project uses some terms that capture the essence of connecting the disconnected to healthy relationships at FBC-GA. Key terms included in this thesis project are *disconnection*, *dissociation*, and *vulnerabilities*, among other significant terms. These terms have some overlap and connect with other terms in some form or another.

Behavioral disciplines are intentional steps toward spiritual growth and godliness that address out-of-control behaviors.¹³ Behavioral disciplines lead to personal growth and fall into three categories. First, interpersonal disciplines such as confession, forgiveness, submission, and humility help repair or restore broken relationships. Secondly, worship disciplines such as singing, celebration, fellowship, community hospitality, and guidance address the spiritual and personal connections of one's life. Thirdly, the healing disciplines of witnessing, giving one's testimony, and interceding relate to healing from brokenness and spiritual renewal.¹⁴

¹³ Ian F. Jones, "Christian Formation of the Self Strategies," in *Counseling Techniques: A Comprehensive Resource for Christian Counselors*, ed. John C. Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 214.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

Cognitive disciplines address a disordered thought life through prayer, Bible study, meditation, and discernment.¹⁵ A cognitive understanding of who a person is and what an individual engages in is the basis of cognitive discipline which acknowledges the relational dimension of spiritual formation, including a sense of relationship and a sense of connectedness to God.¹⁶ Cognitive disciplines allow God to form one's thinking.¹⁷

Decisional forgiveness is a personal decision not to seek revenge, whether implicit or explicit, but to treat the offending individual as a valuable person.¹⁸ Decisional forgiveness is an intentional behavioral decision to forswear revenge and to forbear the expression of anger about a transgression.¹⁹ Decisional forgiveness is an act or decision communicating the intent of a change of feelings.²⁰ Decisional forgiveness is a choice based on a person's intentions to restrain adverse behaviors. Values of social harmony and graciousness often associated with religious beliefs from an intrapersonal perspective are used as a coping mechanism and normally affect one's emotional forgiveness.²¹ Decisional forgiveness helps maintain relational harmony by replacing negative emotions with positive ones.²²

¹⁵ Jones, "Christian Formation of the Self Strategies," 214.

¹⁶ Darrell L. Bock, "New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 109.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Everett L Worthington, Jr., "Understanding Forgiveness of Other People: Definitions, Theories, and Process." in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington, Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 15, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Micael Wenzel, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace between Groups," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade. New York: Routledge, 2019), 322, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>.

²¹ Qinglu Wu et al., "Gratitude and Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships: Roles of Decisional Forgiveness and Emotional Forgiveness," *Current Psychology* 41, no. 5 (May 2022): 2669–2670.

²² Ibid., 2670.

Disconnection is the source of many of the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual ailments experienced today, and, if prolonged, disconnection can lead to withdrawal, chronic isolation, secrecy, and dissociation.²³ Disconnection is a state of being that results from feelings of hurt, disappointment, loneliness, anger, helplessness, and hopelessness that break one's connections with others.²⁴ Disconnection often involves traumatic memories that strengthen negative appraisals and rumination, exacerbate the lost sense of self, and negatively impact social relationships.²⁵ Disconnection is an internal condition that influences the quality of one's relational communication, social connections, and function.²⁶

Dissociation is a process that involves an automatic and spontaneous division between one's thought process and personal awareness.²⁷ Carol Smith notes, "Dissociation allows a person to sustain two or more incompatible actualities without recognizing the incompatibility."²⁸ Dissociation involves the creation of a conceptual and categorical distance between a person and the unbearable things that person has experienced.²⁹ Dissociation is one way for traumatized children to cope with the reality of their trauma that often lingers long into adult life.³⁰

²³ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 3.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Noah Hass-Cohen, "Secure Resiliency Art Therapy Relational Neuroscience Trauma Treatment Principles and Guidelines." *Art Therapy, Trauma, and Neuroscience: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives*, classic ed., ed. Juliet L. King (New York: Routledge, 2022), 103. Taylor & Francis eBook.

²⁶ Ibid., 101–102.

²⁷ Carol M. Smith, "Treating Adults with Complex Trauma or a Complexity of Traumas," in *Trauma Counseling: Theories and Interventions for Managing Trauma, Stress, Crisis, and Disaster*, 2nd ed., ed. Lisa Lopez Levers (New York: Springer, 2023), 137.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Heather Davediuk Gingrich, "Sexual Abuse and Dissociative Disorders," in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, eds. Heather Davediuk Gingrich and Fred C. Gingrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 233–234.

Emotional Forgiveness, in most cases, is preceded by decisional forgiveness because emotional forgiveness allows individuals to see themselves behaving with forgiveness in a benevolent way that allows them to regulate their emotions from negative to positive.³¹ Emotional forgiveness relates to personal healing and has more health and well-being consequences in relational satisfaction.³² Emotional forgiveness involves a transformation from a negative unforgiving emotion to an improved state.³³ When emotional forgiveness takes place, resentment, bitterness, anger, and fear are replaced with empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love, which produces a change in motives as forgiveness is experienced.³⁴ Emotional forgiveness can be understood as sentiments that reflect the transformation of feelings and motivation away from retaliation and avoidance toward a feeling of benevolence to the transgressor.³⁵

Reconciliation centers upon the restoration of trust and involves an interpersonal process different from forgiveness.³⁶ The ability to restore trust in a relationship requires mutually trustworthy behavior from both parties, which is instrumental in healthy relationships.³⁷ Reconciliation does not heal all the relational scars left by a traumatic experience, but it can alleviate some of the guilt and anger associated with abusive-related traumas.³⁸ Reconciliation requires the involvement of both parties. A willingness to change will dictate the future direction

³¹ Qinglu Wu et al., "Gratitude and Satisfaction in Romantic Relationships," 2669–2670.

³² *Ibid.* 2670.

³³ Worthington, Jr., "Understanding Forgiveness of Other People," 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ Wenzel, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace," 322.

³⁶ Everett L. Worthington Jr., Steven J. Sandage, and Jennifer S. Ripley, "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies: The REACH Forgiveness Model," in *Counseling Techniques: A Comprehensive Resource for Christian Counselors*, ed. John C. Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 420.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 432.

³⁸ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 418.

of the relationship between the victim and offender; an unwillingness to change could establish a disconnect that would interfere with the individual's ability to establish new relationships.³⁹

Reconciliation is always relational and must involve the purification process (i.e., catharsis or reformation) in the perpetrator that enables the victim to forgive.⁴⁰ Spiritual reconciliation manifests emotionally and spiritually and often occurs simultaneously with God, another person, and oneself.⁴¹ Jesus suffered mankind's separation from God. In other words, the cry on the cross (Matt 27:45-46) was not a cry of unbelief, confusion, or despair but an expression of separation from God for the reconciliation of mankind.⁴² Jesus provided the example of an act of reconciliation that builds relationships with God and others.

Rumination occurs when an individual is stuck in the thought patterns of past trauma or hurt. One of the purposes of building bridges of new relationships is to stop negative or obsessive ruminations. The repetitive, uncontrollable, passive, and negative thoughts of emotional-focused or stress-reactive rumination disable one's ability to move forward and often lead to sadness, depression, and disconnection, just as worry leads to anxiety.⁴³ The relentless questioning of past failures and experiences directly affects one's emotions, thoughts, and relationships.⁴⁴ Current research on rumination concludes that nearly eighty percent of the

³⁹ Richard S. Balkin, *Practicing Forgiveness: A Path Toward Healing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 52, ProQuest eBook Central.

⁴⁰ Monika Renz, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Initiating Individuation and Enabling Liberation* (London: Routledge, 2022), 3. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003310907>

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴² David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 351.

⁴³ David A. Clark, *The Negative Thoughts Workbook: CBT Skills to Overcome the Repetitive Worry, Shame, and Rumination That Drives Anxiety and Depression* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2020), 69–71, ProQuest eBook Central.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

average person's sixty thousand thoughts per day are negative, and ninety percent are redundant.⁴⁵ Obsessive rumination formulates from an outward focus that is perpetuated by an unhealthy dependence on external circumstances and the need to control everyone and everything.⁴⁶ Breaking negative and obsessive rumination patterns begins with learning to redirect one's attention through practice and awareness.⁴⁷ Ruminations often are entangled in regret and feeling sorry for oneself.⁴⁸ Forgiveness is often impeded by rumination. On the contrary, forgiveness reduces rumination.⁴⁹ Self-forgiveness is a focus on reclaiming one's self-worth, which is often diminished in obsessive ruminations.⁵⁰

Vulnerability exists in response to trauma, illness, and loss between hope and hopelessness, between active and passive, between fight and flight, and between resistance and acceptance.⁵¹ Everyone is vulnerable in some capacity. Vulnerability is one of the raw materials necessary to turn the negativity of disconnection into the joy of connection.⁵² A show of vulnerability leads to one's ability to forgive or to be forgiven.⁵³ Vulnerability is the nature

⁴⁵ Nancy Colier, *Can't Stop Thinking: How to Let Go of Anxiety and Free Yourself from Obsessive Rumination* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2021), 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

⁴⁹ Michael Wenzel, et al., "Dynamics of Moral Repair: Forgiveness, Self-Forgiveness, and the Restoration of Value Consensus as Interdependent Processes," in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 47, no. 4 (July 2020): 608.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Tim Dartington, *Managing Vulnerability: The Underlying Dynamics of Systems of Care*, 2nd ed. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2019), 46, ProQuest eBook Central.

⁵² Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 29.

⁵³ Nathaniel G. Wade and Meredith V. Tittler, "Psychological Interventions to Promote Forgiveness of Others: Review of Empirical Evidence," In *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 258. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>

of close relationships that can produce hurt and difficulties or hope and intimacy.⁵⁴

Limitations

The Building Bridges action research project anticipated certain constraints beyond the researcher's control. The sample pool is limited to FBC-GA members, and it was understood that not all members would participate in the workshop. The researcher anticipated a sample size of twenty, comparable to a Wednesday night Bible study. The option of a morning or Saturday session was based on the request of the members who signed up at the kickoff and that at least ten participants were needed to warrant a second session of the workshop. The target number of twenty or more church members would provide enough input for the evaluation and efficiency of the Building Bridges workshop, even with the possibility of dropouts from the workshop.

The vast amount of information on building healthy relationships cannot be covered in a nine-week workshop. Therefore, this workshop is limited to five specific areas of relationship-building that coincide with the building bridges metaphor. Any future workshops will be fine-tuned but still limited to the five specific areas used in this action research project. The workshop is focused on moving forward, changing inwardly, and building new relationships, limiting the time available to spend discussing disconnection. Information on the types and results of disconnection is limited to the first session and is presented to facilitate personal inspection and reveal the need for building bridges of new relationships. The length of the workshop means all participating church members may not be able to attend each week or complete the nine-week workshop.

⁵⁴ Douglas L. Kelley, Vincent R. Waldron, and Dayna N. Kloeberd, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Reimagining Our Relationships* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 5.

One method of collecting data was the initial inspection (see Appendix E) and the final inspection (see Appendix F). The data collected was used in the form of questionnaires. Focus groups were another method of collecting data. These two small groups made up of participants were held and consisted of discussions on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Building Bridges workshop. Participation in the questionnaires and focus groups was strictly voluntary, which could have limited the number of participants who turned turn in their anonymous questionnaires or participated in the small group sessions at the end of the nine-week workshop. The number of participants who finished the workshop determined the size of the focus groups. This number was less than the number of participants who signed up for the workshop due to some individuals who did not complete the nine weeks.

Delimitations

The researcher strove to include the maximum number of participants within a limited sampling pool by selecting the proper time, place, and length for the workshop. This workshop was held onsite at FBC-GA in the fellowship hall. The initial plan was to offer an evening and morning class. Both sessions covered the same information and lasted one hour. The Building Bridges workshop was held for nine consecutive weeks and was taught by the researcher. The selected evening and time of these sessions varied from the original plan to gain the most participation. The length of each class fluctuated depending on the material; the length of each session was monitored and adjusted after the first full workshop was completed. The Building Bridges kickoff luncheon allowed FBC-GA members to learn about the opportunity to participate in the workshop and provide a preference for the day of the week and time of day for the sessions. Once the dates and times were established, a short meeting was conducted to narrow the evening session to one night. Each member was encouraged to attend the workshop

and participate in each session without sharing any confidential information about any of their past or current hurt.

This workshop was intended to include as many active members as possible who are willing to commit to, attend, and participate in a maximum of a nine-week workshop. This workshop is for any age adult at FBC-GA who is interested in building healthy relationships, whether they have been counseled or not. The anticipated age range for participants in this workshop was from twenty-five to seventy-five, which is the age range of most of the members at FBC-GA, but the targeted age for the workshop is twenty-five to fifty-five. This target reflects the church demographics and does not imply that individuals within the eighteen to twenty-four age range or older than fifty-five were not welcome or expected to participate.

The five stages of the Building Bridges workshop were specifically designed to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of the material to suit a nine-week format. These five stages allowed the researcher proper time to equip church members with the tools for building healthy relationships, allowed time for members to engage in the workshop, workbooks, and surveys, and provided an opportunity for FBC-GA members to reflect and provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of the workshop. The nine sessions were meant to be conducted in succession, with the most critical aspects of relationship-building being discussed each week, as revealed through the literature review. A PowerPoint presentation was created from the outline formed from Chapter Three. Each session was limited to forty to fifty minutes.

Thesis Statement

Building a bridge requires the planning and implementation of a new construction because no bridge is ever built with old parts and debris. Bridge construction requires the removal of debris before the new construction can begin, and there must be a blueprint for the

new construction. Likewise, building bridges of personal and spiritual relationships requires a new start, including the removal of the debris that causes disconnection and making a plan that will transform church members by focusing on and promoting an inward change for those who are willing to participate.

The church cannot remain unhealthy and experience spiritual and numerical growth simultaneously. There must be a blueprint for building healthy relationships. Lifeway Research revealed a drastic decline in membership, a loss of 416 churches, and nearly half a million members from the SBC in 2022.⁵⁵ The SBC membership numbers in 2022 were the lowest since the late 1970s.⁵⁶ The report suggested that the downward movement reflected the record-keeping finally catching up with congregants who stopped attending church years ago and.⁵⁷ This decline is also a reflection of unhealthy relationships due to the constant state of crisis (e.g., controversies over race, major sexual abuse scandals, an ongoing feud over the denomination's leadership, and uncertainty of future direction) that has existed over the recent years in the SBC that has filtered into many of the individual churches of today.⁵⁸

The importance of relationships can be seen first in God's holy community as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is followed by the creation of man and woman for relationships with God and each other.⁵⁹ God never intended for man to be alone (Gen 2:18), and the need for personal and spiritual connection has not diminished, even though many

⁵⁵ Bob Smietana, "Southern Baptists Lost Nearly Half a Million Members in 2022," *Religion News Service* (May 9, 2023), <https://religionnews.com/2023/05/09/southern-baptist-convention-declined-by-nearly-half-a-million-members-in-2022/>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Ron Hawkins and Tim Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor: A Fresh Biblical & Transformational Approach*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2015), 112.

relationships are strained and broken by pride, sin, fear, resentment, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness.⁶⁰ The division and stress in human relationships today is a result of man's disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden (Gen 1-3) and the disconnection or separation from God caused by sin.⁶¹

Loving well should be the goal of the Christian life, but loving well requires one to grow emotionally and spiritually in Christ.⁶² Loving well requires relationships, and these relationships cannot remain healthy if Christians remain emotionally and spiritually immature. Spiritual maturity that leads to healthy relationships is a matter of intentional practice and priority placed on spiritual disciplines and discipleship. Traumatic events and past hurts often affect one's spiritual growth or maturity. Negative reciprocity and ruminations resulting from traumatic events or past hurt hinder a person's ability to move forward and connect with God and others. If members at FBC-GA engage in the Building Bridges workshop, then the rebuilding process will bridge the interpersonal gaps, crossing from relational disconnection to connection.

⁶⁰ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 112.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, updated and expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 165–166.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Observing the current and relevant topics that have already been studied and evaluated for academic discussion is instrumental in producing a Doctor of Ministry project. The process of a literature review is undertaken to study relevant themes and determine any gaps that exist in the current literature. While studying the relevant scholarly works associated with connecting the disconnected after counseling, the researcher identified the following precedent literature as instrumental in this subject matter.

Literature Review

Disconnection from God and others after counseling is a problem for both Christians and non-Christians. Building bridges from disconnection to connection is necessary to fill the relationship gap. Building a bridge of relationships depends on others, and one's ability to learn and grow greatly influences the quality of one's relationships.¹ No one can build a bridge alone. The literature review covers the topic of building bridges that connect the disconnected to God and others after counseling from Christian and secular perspectives.

The Main Causes of Disconnection

The review of relevant literature revealed that disconnection after counseling is often related to education. The topic of disconnection is a common theme for counselees in the termination process of relational therapy. These counselees tend to devalue others, disconnect inwardly, and appear to depart triumphantly even though they are feeling small inside.²

¹ Chloe Drulis et al., "Restoring Relationships, Healing Trauma, and Creating Securely Attached Classrooms," *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 21, no. 13. (2021): 162.

² Emanuel Berman, "Relational Psychoanalysis and Its Discontents," in *De-Idealizing Relational Theory: A Critique from Within*, eds. Lewis Aron, Sue Grand, and Joyce Slochower (New York: Routledge, 2018), 75.

Disconnection is inevitable because no one can perpetually stay in a state of connection. Reciprocally, the negative feelings associated with disconnection (i.e., anger, loneliness, and hopelessness) are the result of the body signaling that something is wrong internally.³ It is difficult for the disconnected to securely connect to God when the individual is struggling with negative feelings (e.g., sadness, shame, guilt, or anger). Many people have a tendency to isolate themselves from God and others, which contributes to more insecurities, more scars, and more disconnection.⁴ Five causes of disconnection frequently emerge in the literature review. The disconnection associated with shame, guilt, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness can be carried for decades from childhood to adulthood, which will affect all interpersonal relationships until the inner hurt is addressed and a process to reconnect relationships begins.⁵

Shame

Shame and guilt are often mentioned together when scholars discuss disconnection. Festering shame and guilt on a counselee leave a relational scar that may go undetected by others for many years or even decades.⁶ Both shame and guilt are moral emotions that involve internal attributions related to previous trauma, hurt, or sin.⁷ However, these two words are not synonymous. The most compelling difference is that shame usually deals with the whole self and

³ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 3.

⁴ Steven J. Sandage, and Jeannine K. Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 142.

⁵ Joanne Zucchetto, Simone Jacobs, and Ly Vick Johnson, *Understanding the Paradox of Surviving Childhood Trauma: Techniques and Tools for Working with Suicidality and Dissociation* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 161, Taylor & Francis eBooks.

⁶ Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar and Rachel Shalit, *When Hurt Remains: Relational Perspectives on Therapeutic Failure*. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 128, Taylor & Francis eBooks.

⁷ Claude-Helene Mayer, Elisabeth Vanderheliden, and Rudolf M. Oosthuizen, "Transforming Shame, Guilt, and Anxiety Through a Salutogenic PP1.0 and PP2.0 Counselling Framework," *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* 32, no.3-4 (April 2019): 440, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2019.1609421>.

is strongly linked to values, identity, and ideals. Conversely, guilt centers on self-blame.⁸ A perceived wrong with the self is often associated with shame.⁹ Individuals experiencing shame often respond to a feeling of failure, even if the shame is not a result of sin or one's natural human desire to follow the flesh.¹⁰ A common result of shame is a broken social bond that leads to a negative self-evaluation that violates one's sense of wholeness.¹¹

Shame is often a response to feelings of helplessness, a violation of bodily integrity, or indignity suffered in the eyes of another person.¹² The negative inward emotions induced by shame always bring negative self-concept, doubt, and hopelessness that leads individuals to feel diminished, defeated, or worthless, which makes it difficult to maintain relationships.¹³ Shame harnesses feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, humiliation, and stupidity that carry more severe personal and social consequences than embarrassment or shyness.¹⁴ The experience of shame for many people is enormously painful and often leads to a feeling of being irreparably flawed and rejected by others.¹⁵ Individuals experiencing shame tend to move away from others (i.e., by withdrawing, keeping silent, or isolating), move toward others (i.e., self-attack to regain

⁸ Mayer, Vanderheliden, and Oosthuizen, "Transforming Shame," 440.

⁹ Stephanie N. Arel, "Disgust, Shame, and Trauma: The Visceral and Visual Impact of Touch." *Trauma and Lived Religion Transcending the Ordinary*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac (Amsterdam: Palgrave Macmillian, 2019), 52.

¹⁰ Ben-Shahar and Shalit. *When Hurt Remains*, 150.

¹¹ Arel, "Disgust, Shame, and Trauma," 55.

¹² Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2022), 77.

¹³ Marylene Cloitre et al., *Treating Survivors of Childhood Abuse and Interpersonal Trauma: STAIR Narrative Therapy* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2020), 112.

¹⁴ John C. Thomas, "Shame-Focused Strategies," in *Counseling Techniques: A Comprehensive Resource for Christian Counselors*, ed. John C. Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 438.

¹⁵ Stephanie T. Burns, "Raising Awareness of the Impact of Guilt and Shame on Counselor Education Students," *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 18, no. 2 (2023): 179.

acceptance from others), or move against others (i.e., attack others as a form of distraction that involves blaming others).¹⁶

The current literature points to shame as an attack on one's dignity, identity, self-worth, and relationships. Unsatisfactory resolution of a past traumatic experience leaves individuals prone to shame and doubt. Shame and the sense of helplessness sever one's connection with others, which directly affects one's ability to have a separate point of view.¹⁷ The debris of old relationships creates shame and acts as an internal roadblock that prevents or hinders the process of building new personal and spiritual relationships.¹⁸ Shame is part of the field of debris that reveals an area of wreckage left behind as a result of the destruction of something that was once intact.¹⁹

Prolonged shame erodes one's trust in God and fractures an individual's relationships with people.²⁰ Shame blights the heart and leaves trust nearly impossible until the occurrence of an inward transformation (i.e., vertical relationship with God) and an outward connection (i.e., horizontal relationship with others).²¹ The scars associated with shame and hurt from the past may never go away, but an inward movement through one's relationship with Christ and others brings a deeper understanding and freedom as one's heart heals and matures.²² Failure, trauma, and loss become fertile ground for shame that takes root and grows deep beneath the surface,

¹⁶ Burns, "Raising Awareness," 179.

¹⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 77.

¹⁸ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 59.

¹⁹ Dan B. Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2016), 254.

²⁰ Jennie Allen, *Find Your People: Building Deep Community in a Lonely World* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2022), 100.

²¹ Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart*, 184.

²² *Ibid.*, 157.

which chokes out life in a place that was meant to bring glory and joy.²³

Guilt

While guilt is associated with trauma and self-blame, most experts believe it is often a response to the wrong actions of the perpetrator and not the victim.²⁴ Self is not the focus of guilt because the focus is most often on a wrong action. The dysfunctions in relationships that are created by guilt may lie dormant for years before surfacing.²⁵ Guilt is often associated with traumas due to loss, physical/sexual abuse, or bullying, but guilt also arises when one fails to keep or disregards the moral standard to which they ascribe.²⁶ Behavior that is inconsistent with one's values can trigger guilt.²⁷ Guilt and shame are often the byproducts of rage and fury that cannot be experienced in their pure form. The hiding, projection, and projective identification allow shame and guilt to bloom.²⁸

The hallmarks of moral injury are guilt and shame.²⁹ Moral injury involves the long-term psychological, behavioral, social, and sometimes spiritual distress that often occurs after one experiences an event that violates deeply held morals and values.³⁰ Guilt is a behavioral focus that stands on the platform of shame.³¹ Guilt reinforces societal group norms, promotes

²³ Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart*, 254–255.

²⁴ Arel, "Disgust, Shame, and Trauma," 52.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 58.

²⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁸ Muriel Dimen and Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar "Like a Drop at the Lip of a Glass," *When Hurt Remains: Relational Perspectives on Therapeutic Failure*. Eds. Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar and Rachel Shalit (New York: Routledge, 2018), 128, Taylor & Francis eBooks.

²⁹ Sonya Norman, "Trauma-Informed Guilt Reduction Therapy: Overview of the Treatment and Research," *Current Treatment Options Psychiatry* 9, no. 3 (2022): 116.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Thomas, "Shame-Focused Strategies," 439.

connection with others, and encourages individuals to respond in a moral, empathic, and social way to remain attached to and accepted by others.³² The transformation of negative emotions and negative experiences associated with guilt can lead to healthy self-worth, positive experiences, and healthy relationships.³³ Shame does not always produce guilt, but guilt almost always produces shame. Studies reveal that trauma-related guilt in the absence of shame is rare and that shame often explains the variances associated with guilt and negative outcomes.³⁴

Bitterness

In the current literature, bitterness has been shown to be related to disconnections that stem from anger. Some of the components of bitterness are unresolved anger, the inability to grieve, and a lack of control, which can manifest into a desire for revenge, resentment, sarcasm, unkind and critical comments, and conflict with others.³⁵ Unresolved bitterness coincides with unexpressed anger and bitterness that haunts present relationships and becomes the source of lingering conflicts.³⁶ Relationships are affected by bitterness when individuals focus on the negative aspects of the relationship and allow affection and appreciation for others to diminish.³⁷

Bitterness, like shame and guilt, builds into more hurt and lingering problems if not addressed. All church members will face bitterness, but facing difficult circumstances in life

³² Burns, "Raising Awareness," 179.

³³ Mayer, Vanderheliden, and Oosthuizen, "Transforming Shame," 442.

³⁴ Norman, "Trauma-Informed Guilt Reduction Therapy," 116.

³⁵ Fred Milacci, "Counseling Biblical and Spiritual Issues," in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems*, eds. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 180.

³⁶ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 61.

³⁷ Kelly E. Green, *Relationships in Recovery: Repairing Damage and Building Healthy Connections While Overcoming Addiction* (New York: Guilford Press, 2021), 57, ProQuest eBook Central.

can produce a deeper connection with Christ.³⁸ Stephen Viars claims, “It only takes occasional bitterness to poison a situation or relationship.”³⁹ All bitterness can be avoided if individuals choose to view their situation through the lens of God’s fatherly discipline and His sanctifying purpose for them.⁴⁰ Bitterness cannot be allowed to fester in healthy relationships because the hurts in a relationship are often the result of unresolved misunderstandings.⁴¹

The loss of hope that a moral expectation will be corrected and the frustration that follows can lead to bitterness.⁴² The sting of bitterness develops when a settled dispute favors the wrong side, or the losing party feels the matters were left unresolved or resolved incorrectly.⁴³ Bitterness and resentment lead to the isolation of disconnection until the person develops a new desire to seek love, warmth, and connection.⁴⁴ The destructiveness of bitterness is felt emotionally, physically, and spiritually; bitterness grows like a cancer until it destroys everything around it.⁴⁵ Bitterness often harms the offended more than the offender because the bitterness of the offended eats away at once was a soft heart.⁴⁶ Prolonged disconnection resulting from bitterness intentionally or unintentionally contributes to unforgiveness.⁴⁷

³⁸ Stephen Viars, *Overcoming Bitterness: Moving from Life's Greatest Hurts to a Life Filled with Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2021), 40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹ Allen, *Find Your People*, 171.

⁴² Anna Cremaldi and Jack M.C. Kwong, “Bitterness without Hope,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 54, no. 1 (December 2021): 131–132.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁴ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 26.

⁴⁵ Milacci, “Counseling Biblical and Spiritual Issues,” 180.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 91.

Anger

Anger is often described as an outward emotion in counseling literature, but the type of anger focused on in the literature review is the inward anger associated with disconnection that builds up in the individual from previous hurt or trauma. The emotion of anger cannot remain buried beneath the surface. Jim Wilson notes, “Anger, like denial, can be an adaptive strategy to cope with the pain. . . . Some view depression as anger turned inward.”⁴⁸ The enormously painful emotions associated with shame are similarly expressed in anger. Anger can often result in rage and bitterness but can also become a springboard for change.⁴⁹

The problem with anger is that it can be hidden for a season, but unlike shame and guilt, it cannot be contained. Rage is intense anger that normally manifests as an outward expression of one’s inner anger.⁵⁰ Positive results can be produced through anger, but anger is most often associated with a negative emotion that camouflages pain.⁵¹ One’s sense of vulnerability decreases when anger increases, which makes connecting with others or making a call for help difficult.⁵² Anger can be expressed in a healthy or unhealthy manner, but it is often viewed as negative and dangerous.⁵³ Anger is one of the most powerful but least understood emotions and is almost always a secondary emotion developed in response to a primary emotion.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Jim L. Wilson, *Pastoral Ministry in the Real World: Loving, Teaching, and Leading God’s People*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 36. ProQuest eBook Central.

⁴⁹ Berman, “Relational Psychoanalysis and Its Discontents,” 74.

⁵⁰ Sharyn Higdon Jones, *Healing Steps: A Gentle Path to Recovery for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (San Jose, CA: Inner Journey Productions, 2018), 129.

⁵¹ H. Norman Wright, *The Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling: What to Do and Say When it Matters Most*, updated and expanded ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishing, 2014), 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 111–112.

⁵³ Gary J. Oliver, “Counseling Biblical and Spiritual Issues, in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems*, eds. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 178.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

Recent literature suggests that anger is a whole person's response to a provoking stimulus; something perceived as offensive.⁵⁵ Lingering anger draws attention to the self and that there is a problem that needs attention and hidden inner anger is often brought to the surface in the healing process.⁵⁶ On the other hand, righteous anger is a response to sin and not to a person, focuses on God and His kingdom and not one's own kingdom, and expresses itself in a godly, self-controlled manner that does not scream with rage, wallow in self-pity, or withdraw from people.⁵⁷ Anger is more than a feeling. Anger often becomes a mode of transportation that can move an individual out of disconnection and dissociation into a present moment of connection.⁵⁸

Unforgiveness

A critical theme in both Christian and secular literature is unforgiveness. A person in a state of unforgiveness is void of the capacity to surrender and often carries thoughts of revenge or retaliation.⁵⁹ Attitudes of unforgiveness are influenced by shame, guilt, and anger, but the feelings of hurt last long after a relational conflict or traumatic event which leads to avoidantly attached individuals that become disconnected.⁶⁰ Unforgiveness is a burden of discomfort that often produces a grudge.⁶¹ Unforgiveness is often disguised as bitterness, resentment, cynicism, and skepticism and steals one's intimacy with God and closeness to the individuals he or she

⁵⁵ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 259.

⁵⁶ Ian F. Jones, *Healing Steps*, 126.

⁵⁷ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 261.

⁵⁸ Barbara Pizer, "Daring Anger and Intimacy: Clinical Failure or Success?" in *When Hurt Remains: Relational Perspectives on Therapeutic Failure*, eds. Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar and Rachel Shalit (New York: Routledge, 2018), 115.

⁵⁹ Sandage and Brown, *Relational Integration*, 142.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley, "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies," 426.

loves the most.⁶² These soldiers of unforgiveness will continue to rage war against faith, trust, and love and will keep digging deeper and deeper into the innermost emotions of an individual, causing the person to be unable to move forward.⁶³

Current literature suggests that unforgiveness causes feelings of anger or resentment toward the offender and hinders one's ability to connect to others, as connection involves personal change and forgiveness to heal.⁶⁴ The start of the healing process for the scar of unforgiveness is learning to forgive oneself and a willingness to acknowledge the damage and realize the damage is not internally permanent.⁶⁵ One crucial element of forgiveness is one's ability to identify areas or events in his or her life in which some unforgiveness remains.⁶⁶

The Effects of Disconnection

A consensus found in the literature review suggests that disconnection is most often a direct result of long-term shame, guilt, and bitterness that often lie beneath the surface of one's outward emotions, even after counseling. The topic of disconnection has been covered and well-debated in current literature. The effects of disconnection are a splitting of personality between mind and body, truth, reality, and consciousness that often leads to emotional blindness, a lack of physical sensation, and the impossibility of feeling and speaking about these realities or truths.⁶⁷ Everyone will experience disconnection or the negative impact of disconnection at some point,

⁶² Lysa Terkeurst, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2020), 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁶⁴ Balkin, *Practicing Forgiveness*, 55.

⁶⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 297.

⁶⁶ Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley, "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies," 428.

⁶⁷ Clara Mucci, *Resilience and Survival: Understanding and Healing Intergenerational Trauma* (London: Confer Books, 2022), 54–55.

but the key is not to avoid it.⁶⁸ While there are many effects of disconnection, the focus of this literature review will be on the four most common results of prolonged disconnection. These four effects are dissociation, withdrawal, isolation, and secrecy.

Dissociation

The term *dissociation* appears often in the literature review. Dissociation is a form of disconnection but is uniquely different from withdrawal, isolation, secrecy, and other forms of disconnection. Dissociation is one of the most effective defense mechanisms for adults dealing with a complex history of trauma, but it often goes unnoticed by the victim and those in relationships with the victim.⁶⁹ The defense mechanisms most common in individuals experiencing PTSD symptoms are dissociation and resentment.⁷⁰ Dissociation refers to the feeling that one has “checked out,” a state of daydreaming, or impaired ability to cope and function in the real world.⁷¹ The source of dissociation is almost always trauma.⁷² A recent study of veterans revealed that anger was a significant predictor of severe PTSD and dissociation and that dissociation alone predicted intrusion.⁷³ Intrusion is the highest symptom of dissociation and is most profound in individuals who are categorized as having high PTSD and high dissociation.⁷⁴ The combination of anger and dissociation produces functional impairment and

⁶⁸ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 22.

⁶⁹ Smith, “Treating Adults with Complex Trauma,” 137.

⁷⁰ Kristi Kanel, *A Guide to Crisis Intervention*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage, 2019), 135.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷² Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 82.

⁷³ Tory A. Durham et al., “Latent Profile Analysis of PTSD and Dissociation, and Relations with Anger,” *Current Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2022): 1596.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1600.

avoidance or numbing symptoms.⁷⁵

Mariele Wulf defines dissociation as “separating from one’s own personality.”⁷⁶ Giovanni Liotti elaborates that dissociation involves several layers of detachment from the consciousness (e.g., absorption, depersonalization, amnesia, derealization, and other forms of disconnection), which becomes evident in a person’s behavior from his or her ability to disconnect between consciousness and experience or mind and body.⁷⁷ Dissociation is a result of the pain of long-term disconnection and one of the most common ways to escape the pain of the past or to create distance that allows one to mentally leave one’s body to flee the hurt.⁷⁸ This disconnected experience can also be described as dulling or numbing that creates the needed distance from the hurt of the past.⁷⁹

Understanding the guilt, shame, and hurt that lie beneath the disconnection with others that causes dysfunction in relationships and dissociation creates an opportunity for the building of new relationships that focus on new connections by removing debris from the past. The process of dissociation can become easy, effortless, and entirely unconscious for children.⁸⁰ Dissociation is the vertical interruption of connection and the disintegration of the sense of self that involves several layers of detachment.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Durham, et al., “Latent Profile Analysis of PTSD,” 1596.

⁷⁶ Mariele Wulf, “Trauma in Relationship—Healing by Religion: Restoring Dignity and Meaning After Traumatic Experiences,” in *Trauma and Lived Religion Transcending the Ordinary*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac (Amsterdam: Palgrave Macmillian, 2019), 137.

⁷⁷ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 78.

⁷⁸ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 18–19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁰ Gingrich, “Sexual Abuse and Dissociative Disorders,” 235.

⁸¹ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 78.

Withdrawal

Despite advances in counseling interventions and relationship strategies, church members often remain withdrawn and isolated after counseling. While the terms *withdrawal* and *isolation* are similar in definition, they do not have identical meanings concerning disconnection.

Withdrawal is a barrier that is put up to protect oneself from feeling pain but can also keep individuals from experiencing God's design for intimacy.⁸² Heartache and pain are experienced by flawed people throughout the Bible who can choose to avoid it or endure it.⁸³ Relational avoidance is a type of withdrawal that occurs when individuals fail to let others know about their hurt by keeping it to themselves and turning away from other relationships, which also directly relates to secrecy.⁸⁴ A failure to let go of negative motivations and emotions combined with unforgiveness leads to withdrawal for individuals dealing with disconnection.⁸⁵

Most forgiveness researchers support a dual process of letting go of negative emotions, negative motivations, and the desire to withdraw from relationships and replacing them with benevolence and positive motivation over time as a means of repairing relationships.⁸⁶ The process of withdrawal can be a subconscious or conscious response to social interactions. For example, when receiving criticism or an insult, one's initial impulse may be to withdraw, but the individual may suppress the urge to withdraw by responding in a more mutually satisfying

⁸² Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 77.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Wade and Tittler, "Psychological Interventions to Promote Forgiveness," 249.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey D. Green et al., "An Interdependence Analysis of Forgiveness, Amends, and Relational Repair in Family and Work Relationships," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington, Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade (New York: Routledge, 2019), 131. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

manner.⁸⁷ The influence of withdrawal can be both psychological and emotional when one allows negative behavior to remain, often leading to destructive relationships.⁸⁸ The progression of withdrawal includes individuals shutting down emotionally as a natural response to past hurts.⁸⁹ Withdrawal often leads to isolation.

Isolation

Both secular and religious literature agree that isolation is an indication that those dealing with disconnection that leads to dysfunctional relationships are nearing rock bottom. Shame, along with isolation, prevents many individuals from asking for or accepting help.⁹⁰ Isolation activates one's neuroplasticity for learning which is also activated by social connection and emotional attunement.⁹¹ Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change and adapt in response to new or adverse experiences. A common reason for isolation is relational avoidance, which allows someone to keep to themselves instead of letting others know about the trauma or distress in his or her life.⁹² As a result, isolation produces a wall of defense that stops anyone from penetrating but also leaves the hurting person lonely and still hurting.⁹³ Isolation breeds loneliness that escalates when an individual is dishonest with himself or herself.⁹⁴ One of the

⁸⁷ Debbie Teike and Katti J. Sneed, "Building and Restoring Relationships Using the Art of Invitation: An Exploratory Phenomenological Study," *Social Work and Christianity* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 4.

⁸⁸ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 116.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰ Francine Shapiro, *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy: Basic Principles, Protocols, and Procedures*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2018), 91.

⁹¹ Drulis et al., "Restoring Relationships," 152–154.

⁹² Gary Sibcy, "Attachment-Oriented Strategies," in *Counseling Techniques: A Comprehensive Resource for Christian Counselors*, ed. John C. Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 248.

⁹³ Zucchetto, Jacobs, and Johnso, *Understanding the Paradox*, 5.

⁹⁴ Green, *Relationships in Recovery*, 108.

most difficult things to overcome is not the trauma but the loss of connection, the pervasive loneliness, and the isolation that comes from the feeling that there is no one to turn to.⁹⁵

Developing new relationships is difficult for someone who has avoided relationships or emotional intimacy for years, but it is necessary to overcome the pain and danger to one's well-being caused by isolation.⁹⁶ Isolation is often an attempt to protect an individual from future betrayal, hurt, and broken trust that requires a change in relationship patterns.⁹⁷ If a person is locked into a self-protective mode, then his or her life will continue to linger in isolation. Isolation breeds alienation and paralyzes the individual both emotionally and relationally.⁹⁸ Self-dishonesty often leads to overconfidence in one's ability to address a problem, lack of preparation, and rejection of offered help, which often leads to further isolation and disconnection.⁹⁹

Secrecy

A foundational problem that emerged from the literature review on disconnection is secrecy. Secrecy is possibly the single most common reason for dysfunctional relationships. One of the major obstacles to resolving hurt is secrecy, which often hinders an individual's ability to function as a whole person, which directly relates to disconnection.¹⁰⁰ The development of secrecy can paralyze any existing relationship by allowing the hurt of past trauma to fester

⁹⁵ Zucchetto, Jacobs, and Johnson, *Understanding the Paradox*, 161.

⁹⁶ Cloitre, et al., *Treating Survivors of Childhood Abuse*, 301.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁹⁹ Green, *Relationships in Recovery*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 379.

inside an individual.¹⁰¹ Secrecy involves hiding one's hurt and vulnerability, which diminishes one's ability to engage with or connect with God and others.¹⁰²

Secrecy causes disconnection because it hides hurt so that it cannot be examined, known, or repaired from the outside (e.g., through counseling, mentoring, or coaching), but it affects every relationship until the hurt surfaces. There is no age limit to secrecy; it can even begin in childhood, which makes connecting emotionally and socially extremely difficult even in adult relationships.¹⁰³ The inwardness of secrecy blocks the development of many of the relational skills needed throughout life, even despite counseling efforts.¹⁰⁴ Thus, a gap has formed between counseling and healthy relationships because the disconnection of secrecy can make counseling ineffective. However, not every counselee experiences secrecy because some counsees have developed a healthy relationship with the counselor that exposes secrecy.

The Need for Connection

While experts frequently debate the methods of connection in relationships, all agree that everyone needs healthy relationships to thrive in this society. One of the ways to overcome the brokenness of disconnection is not to recreate the broken but to learn from others who have chosen connection over isolation.¹⁰⁵ The gap that evolved in relationships after counseling is the result of disconnection. The ability to repair disconnection does not require an individual to

¹⁰¹ Jurgen Jian Lembke and Julianne Funk, "Feeding the Hungry Spirits: A Socially Engaged Buddhist Response to the Distortion of Trauma," in *Trauma and Lived Religion Transcending the Ordinary*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Srdjan Sremac. (Amsterdam: Palgrave Macmillian, 2019), 185.

¹⁰² Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 78.

¹⁰³ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Zucchetto, Jacobs, and Johnson, *Understanding the Paradox*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, *Find Your People*, 12–13.

return to his or her broken relationships but to build new relationships.¹⁰⁶ Personal and spiritual connection requires healthy relationships.

Personal Relationships

Studies have shown that strong personal relationships are the best predictor of a happy and fulfilling life.¹⁰⁷ Personal relationships not only produce happiness but also provide relaxation to help ward off any negative effects of stress.¹⁰⁸ The brain is socially constructed through human relationships and wired for social development that produces one's systems of trust, hope, self-esteem, and connectedness.¹⁰⁹ Social relationships have been proven to influence one's coping ability positively.¹¹⁰ Relationships require commitment and continuous investments to become lasting.¹¹¹ In recent years, the number of connections most people have has increased due to the sheer volume of interactions, but the quality of connections is decreasing. The need to bond is why most people do not spend their time wandering in solitary bliss.¹¹²

Personal relationships access one's interior self and inner values, which are necessary for regaining one's dignity, identity, and trust.¹¹³ One's value as an individual (i.e., one's dignity) is developed through healthy feelings, relationships, and trust. Dignity is the apex of emotional and

¹⁰⁶ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

¹⁰⁸ Kory Floyd, "Forming and Maintaining Personal Relationships," in *Interpersonal Communication*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2021), 285.

¹⁰⁹ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 49.

¹¹⁰ Teike and Sneed, "Building and Restoring Relationships," 4.

¹¹¹ Floyd, "Forming and Maintaining Personal Relationships," 286–288.

¹¹² Kory Floyd, *The Loneliness Cure: Six Strategies for Finding Real Connection in Your Life* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2015), 28.

¹¹³ Wulf, "Trauma in Relationship," 135.

moral orientation, as well as a key to personal relationships.¹¹⁴ Dignity is safeguarded by unconditional, all-embracing, and faithful love that is built through personal relationships.¹¹⁵ Restoration of dignity must be an early step in the process of rebuilding personal relationships.

One key aspect of personal relationships is vulnerability. Faller and Wright divulge in *True Connections* that one of the ways to make connections is to be vulnerable because one's vulnerability can repair that which is divided.¹¹⁶ Vulnerabilities can keep individuals from connecting, but vulnerabilities can also be the key to resilience and restoration that leads to healthy relationships.¹¹⁷ Honesty requires a vulnerability with an individual that may include some risk to their self-identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.¹¹⁸ A sense of vulnerability is often experienced when rebuilding broken trust, and rebuilding trust facilitates reconciliation.¹¹⁹

Trusting others within safe personal relationships is essential to trusting oneself.¹²⁰ Relationships require daily attention that requires both individuals in the relationship to remain conscious or aware of their differences, disappointments, and disillusionments.¹²¹ The building of relationships provides a sense of identity, a sense of connection, and a sense of relief in the healing process, which is paramount to the well-being of every relationship and allows individual growth.¹²²

¹¹⁴ Wulf, "Trauma in Relationship," 133–134.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹⁶ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 77.

¹¹⁷ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 98.

¹¹⁸ Green, *Relationships in Recovery*, 114.

¹¹⁹ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 115.

¹²⁰ Wulf, "Trauma in Relationship," 136.

¹²¹ Sharyn Higdon Jones, *Healing Steps*, 192–193.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 191–192.

Grief was not discussed as one of the causes of disconnection, but it adversely affects one's relationships. The problem with grief is that it goes beyond an outwardly expressed behavior because it is a whole-person experience that can lead to despair, sadness, hopelessness, and emptiness.¹²³ The relational scars caused by grief often lead to shame, guilt, bitterness, isolation, or withdrawal. Building healthy personal relationships can help an individual overcome grief with love, joy, and hope.

Spiritual Relationships

Traumatic events or experiences can affect an individual's spirituality by interrupting, altering, or severing one's beliefs (i.e., values, goals, and perceptions of events).¹²⁴ When one's spirituality is affected by trauma, hurt, or loss, one's spiritual relationships are also affected. One's human relationships often parallel one's spiritual relationships.¹²⁵ The Building Bridges approach focuses on building and maintaining one's spiritual relationships by inwardly renewing or transforming individuals through spiritual disciplines, discipleship, and the work of the Holy Spirit, all of which positively affect one's relationships with others.

The relationship between God and the individual is the foundation of all spiritual relationships. Spiritual relationships begin as a restoration of the image of God in the core self, and the key ingredient for this ultimate transformation of the total person is the Holy Spirit.¹²⁶ Many Christians have difficulty with their sense of worth or feel confusion in regard to their identity because they base their self-worth and identity on how others perceive them and not

¹²³ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 365.

¹²⁴ Wulf, "Trauma in Relationship," 132.

¹²⁵ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 78.

¹²⁶ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, " 324.

God's perspective (i.e., spiritual lens).¹²⁷ Confusion of identity will cause a strain on one's vertical relationship with God that will impact one's horizontal relationships with others. A spiritual relationship involves the process of spiritual change or soul growth, but this transformation of the soul requires work and effort.¹²⁸

The secondary spiritual relationship is the relationship between the church and the individual, which involves worship, fellowship, and discipleship. The church has a responsibility to show compassion to those who are broken and wounded and not to view them as unspiritual or treat their hurt with shame and condemnation.¹²⁹ The body of Christ, which is the church, is an essential element of spiritual formation because the Christian life was never intended to be pursued in isolation.¹³⁰ The process of spiritual formation requires the innermost being (i.e., heart, will, and spirit) of an individual to take on the character of Christ, which will shape one's spirit and character because believers cannot conform themselves to the image of Christ.¹³¹ Spiritual formation is the primary task of the church community in the context of their encounter with God in worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service that reflects the nature of God.¹³²

The purpose of a spiritual relationship is not just physicality or spirituality but godliness. The spiritual world is the training ground for the needed repair of disconnection from the

¹²⁷ Neil T. Anderson, Terry E. Zuehlke, and Julie Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2000), 189–190.

¹²⁸ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 323.

¹²⁹ Anderson, Zuehlke, and Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy*, 314.

¹³⁰ Jonathan Morrow, "Introducing Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 47.

¹³¹ Mark A. Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development*, eds. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 241.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 244

physical world, but the goal is godliness.¹³³ Godliness is defined as the embodiment of God's interest and God's will right here in this world and right now.¹³⁴ All believers are called to be holy (1 Pet 1:16) and to exercise godliness (1 Tim 4:7–8). Worship becomes a form of godliness when individuals worship God because individuals will become like what they worship and what they surrender to.¹³⁵ Worshipping God is immersive and becomes a very powerful tool for dramatically uplifting the worshipper as they take on certain qualities and characteristics of the One being worshipped. On the other hand, worship can be degrading if the worship becomes heathenistic or worldly.¹³⁶

Every spiritual relationship requires individuals to engage in spiritual formation in a way that goes beyond the mere outward form and focuses on being formed and transformed to the likeness of Christ (Gal 4:19).¹³⁷ The act of spiritual formation includes self-nurturing practice and relationships with others that become an intentional and continual commitment to a lifetime of growth toward the wholeness of God.¹³⁸ Spiritual formation calls for engagement in spiritual disciplines that build on one's spiritual relationship with God and help the individual to develop healthy relationships with others.

The Process of Building Healthy Relationships

Building healthy relationships, like building a bridge, requires a plan. A bridge cannot be built in just any manner, and the steps cannot be completed in any order. There must be a plan

¹³³ Manis Friedman and Rivka Goldstein, *Creating a Life That Matters: How to Live and Love with Meaning and Purpose* (New York: It is Good to Know Publishing, 2021), 119.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 240–41.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 244.

that can be implemented in the building process to ensure the completion of the project. The most significant components of a bridge are the foundation, support piers, anchor plates, central span, and deck. Each of these elements has a parallel with the elements of love, trust, hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation that are necessary for building healthy relationships. The process of building healthy relationships must begin with a solid foundation.

The Foundation of Love

The foundation of love in relationships is like a bridge's foundation because love was not meant to be a solo act. A contractor cannot build a bridge with only a foundation or build a bridge without a foundation. Piers, anchors, and a deck are also needed to complete the project effectively, but every relationship must be built on a foundation of love. The act of love is a universal motivator that drives individuals to do what is necessary to meet the needs of others.¹³⁹

Many counseling experts have used the iceberg model to illustrate the importance of getting below the surface to the source of one's emotions. A foundation must be built far below the surface of a bridge and must be the first stage in building a bridge. Likewise, the foundation of love in relationships must be built deep beneath the surface to reach the foundation of one's emotions. Otherwise, individuals will often revert back to or continue to deny their pain, loss, and grief, eventually transforming into an empty shell with a smiley face painted on them.¹⁴⁰ The foundation of one's emotions must be love, as love allows individuals to focus on one emotion and not a wider range of negative emotions (e.g., depression, fear, and anger).¹⁴¹

Love can be used in problem-solving by applying the LOVE acronym in healthy

¹³⁹ Floyd, *The Loneliness Cure*, 43–44.

¹⁴⁰ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 44.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

conflict resolution. The LOVE acronym teaches individuals to Listen, Observe, Value, and Evaluate.¹⁴² The desire to love is evidence of humans' built-in desire to belong, connect, and explore the world.¹⁴³ The pursuit of love and compassion is key to healthy relationships and interpersonal forgiveness, which produce emotional forgiveness toward others.¹⁴⁴

Individuals do not learn love by trying because love must be received before it can be given. The key to learning how to love is experiencing love and then passing it on.¹⁴⁵ The emotional bond of love provides an antidote to stress and anxiety through high degrees of engagement, vulnerability, and responsiveness.¹⁴⁶ The product of love is helping others find freedom and hope in Christ that connects them to a personal relationship with a loving God. Love means being an active listener who gives his or her full attention to others, and notices when others need encouragement.¹⁴⁷ The basis of love is a commitment to honoring, serving, and forgiving others.¹⁴⁸

Christ's example and command for all Christians to love one another (John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17) is the foundation for building healthy relationships. No bridge or relationship can be built without a solid foundation, and the love of Christ is the solid foundation of relationships. One's spiritual disciplines need to develop a rule of life that centers around loving Christ above all else.¹⁴⁹ A rule of life that focuses on loving Christ is transforming oneself into His image, which

¹⁴² Jennifer S. Ripley and Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Couple Therapy: A New Hope-Focused Approach*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 215–218.

¹⁴³ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 50–51.

¹⁴⁴ Worthington, Jr., "Understanding Forgiveness of Other People," 11–14.

¹⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?* (New York: Viking, 2022), 196.

¹⁴⁶ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 51.

¹⁴⁷ Dave Earley, "How to Love One Another," in *Spiritual Formation Is ...How to Grow in Jesus with Passion and Confidence*, eds. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 175.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 175–178.

¹⁴⁹ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 189.

allows individuals to have the same goals as other believers, and that is a union with God in Christ.¹⁵⁰ The love of Christ must be the foundation of every individual and every healthy relationship. Trials, trauma, or circumstances should never keep one from the love of God in Christ Jesus.¹⁵¹

The Support Piers of Trust

The support piers of trust are built on the foundation of love. A decision to trust should be based on Godly trust, which allows individuals to grow in faith, deepen intimacy with God, and base their identity on Christ and not one's circumstances.¹⁵² Circumstances should never change one's trust in God because no matter the storm one may be experiencing, God's presence remains, and God will use the storms of life for His purpose and glory.¹⁵³ The formation of trust begins with an inward transformation of the whole heart and a vertical relationship with God (Ps 71:5, 118:8–9, Prov 3:5, 1 Tim 4:10). The ability to trust begins in childhood and is influenced by one's health and happiness from their caregiver and serves as one of the foundations of human development.¹⁵⁴

Disconnection is often the byproduct of broken trust that comes through many avenues (e.g, trauma, loss, grief). On the contrary, connection starts with trust that God's plan and purpose are good even when one's circumstances are far from good.¹⁵⁵ When trust is erased, the

¹⁵⁰ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 193.

¹⁵¹ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 146.

¹⁵² Craig Groeschel, *Divine Direction: 7 Decisions That Will Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 170.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 187–189.

¹⁵⁴ Judith L. Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 49–50.

¹⁵⁵ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 177.

human spirit is deadened, and the individual is subconsciously reduced to survival mode.¹⁵⁶ Broken trust creates a need for self-protection, leading to avoidance, disconnection, and the unwillingness to get close to others because of the risk of rejection or harm.¹⁵⁷ Rebuilding trust is crucial to rebuilding and reconnecting relationships, but trust must be established before healing the hurts of anger, shame, and guilt can begin.¹⁵⁸ The process of rebuilding trust and building a relationship of love breeds hope that allows spiritual and personal connection.¹⁵⁹

Trust plays a significant role in forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is often an expression of trust, mutual satisfaction, and a shift in one's self-identity. Reconciliation involves the process of rebuilding trust and positive relationships that are oriented toward a shared future but must deal with the past to be successful.¹⁶⁰ Mistrust and anger are often directed at God upon the death of a loved one, but what is needed in a time of loss is trust in God as the supreme support pier of one's heart and future relationships.¹⁶¹ Conversely, a lack of trust and a lack of vulnerability are often the byproducts of anxiety, which can produce trust in idols rather than God's goodness and power.¹⁶²

The Anchor Plates of Hope

Building a bridge without anchor plates can increase the level of stress on the structure and eventually lead to its destruction. Hope is the anchor plate of relationships. The most deeply wounded, fragmented, or damaged individuals can have hope through the presence of a

¹⁵⁶ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 63.

¹⁵⁷ Zucchetto, Jacobs, and Johnson, *Understanding the Paradox*, 161.

¹⁵⁸ Pizer, "Daring Anger and Intimacy," 115.

¹⁵⁹ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 159.

¹⁶⁰ Wenzel, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace," 322.

¹⁶¹ Sandage and Brown, *Relational Integration*, 176.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 58.

miracle-working God and a relationship with God.¹⁶³ Hope is based on God's grace, which entices individuals to look honestly at the depth of their sins, the hope of salvation, and their need for a Savior, the blessed hope (Titus 2:13).¹⁶⁴ Individuals who are hurting need the empathetic encouragement conveyed by God's hope, peace, comfort, and power amid the hurt.¹⁶⁵ The promise of hope replaces doubts and self-pity with a new sense of confidence built on spiritual insights, values, and goals.¹⁶⁶ This hope does not only help the disconnected to become connected, but it also helps the pastor, counselor, or mentor remain focused on God amid the difficult work of counseling these individuals.¹⁶⁷

Don Parker, a long-time educator and principal, uses the building bridges metaphor to foster hope in his students, as displayed in his book on building bridges.¹⁶⁸ He defines hope as a psychological strength that functions as a buffer between difficult experiences and well-being.¹⁶⁹ Dr. Parker instills in his teachers and counselors the need to counter feelings of hopelessness by fostering hope and a positive outlook.¹⁷⁰ This kind of hope is one of the goals the Building Bridges workshop seeks to accomplish for the members at FBC-GA.

¹⁶³ Gingrich, "Sexual Abuse and Dissociative Disorders," 252.

¹⁶⁴ Ian F. Jones, "Christian Formation of the Self Strategies," 200.

¹⁶⁵ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2020), 79, ProQuest eBook Central.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *Crisis & Trauma Counseling*, 154–155.

¹⁶⁷ Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling*, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Don Parker, *Building Bridges: Engaging Students at Risk Through the Power of Relationships*. (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2019), ProQuest eBook Central.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 101–102.

The Central Span of Forgiveness

The central span is the last section of spans when building a bridge, which allows for the deck and project to be completed. Likewise, the central span of forgiveness provides a platform for the deck of reconciliation. C.S. Lewis states, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.”¹⁷¹ The starting point for forgiveness can be defined in time, but forgiveness is not a one-time event because it involves a journey to inner healing that may require uncovering various layers of wounds or grief over time.¹⁷² Forgiveness is the extension of grace toward others based on God’s great gift of forgiveness in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁷³

Forgiveness is at the center of Christianity and effective pastoral counseling.¹⁷⁴ The motivation for forgiveness is found in the command of Christ (Matt 6:12,14–15) and in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35), which encourages individuals to forgive out of duty, responsibility, accountability, and the desire to please God and avoid displeasing Him.¹⁷⁵ The act of forgiveness is the chief means of dealing with and repairing relationships that have been corroded or disrupted by hurt and negative feelings.¹⁷⁶ The Bible does not say forgive and forget, but Christians are instructed to let go of what is behind them so they can move forward

¹⁷¹ Terkeurst, *Forgiving What You Can’t Forget*, 21.

¹⁷² Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 164–165.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁷⁴ Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “Helping People Forgive: Getting to the Heart of the Matter.” In *Caring for People God’s Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma*, eds. Tim Clinton, George Ohlschlager, and Archibald Hart (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005), 119.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁷⁶ Frank D. Fincham, “Forgiveness in Marriage.” In *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington, Jr and Nathaniel G. Wade (New York: Routledge, 2019), 142, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>.

without the weight of bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness. While individuals can forgive and not forget, God is connected with forgetting (Heb 8:12; 10:17).¹⁷⁷

The process of forgiveness involves a transformation from a desire of feelings for retaliation and avoidance to an attitude of benevolence toward the transgressor and emotional and decisional forgiveness.¹⁷⁸ Scientifically and spiritually, forgiveness is used as a coping mechanism but can be confused with other experiences or used as an act of insincerity.¹⁷⁹ Forgiveness is not always motivated by the desire to build relationships but rather by the desire to be obedient to God.¹⁸⁰ True forgiveness is setting oneself free, looking past the hurt, and walking in step with God.¹⁸¹ Obedience to God is a necessary tool for building relationships with God and others.

Psychological forgiveness helps individuals release hatred and thoughts of revenge by extending grace to and praying for the perpetrator.¹⁸² The process of forgiveness begins with a decision to forgive, but this decision does not heal all the damaged emotions immediately. Anger, fear, bitterness, broken trust, and guilt are not automatically removed when one decides to forgive, but the process of forgiveness works on these negative emotions to create positive emotions that can be the basis of healthy relationships.¹⁸³ Fred Milacci asserts, “Forgiveness is the antithesis or antidote for bitterness.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Terkeurst, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Wenzel, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace,” 322–323.

¹⁷⁹ Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley. “Forgiveness-Focused Strategies,” 420.

¹⁸⁰ Terkeurst, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, 18.

¹⁸¹ Earley, “How to Love One Another,” 178–179.

¹⁸² Gingrich, “Sexual Abuse and Dissociative Disorders,” 248–249.

¹⁸³ Terkeurst, *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, 47.

¹⁸⁴ Milacci, “Counseling Biblical and Spiritual Issues, 180–181.

On the other hand, forgiveness is not accomplished through receiving a simple apology, forgetting, excusing, justifying, or condoning wrong behavior. These appropriate responses to hurt may reduce unforgiveness but should not be confused with emotional and decisional forgiveness.¹⁸⁵ Forgiveness cannot be forced upon individuals.¹⁸⁶ An attitude of forgiveness does not necessitate reconciliation between the victim and perpetrator, but it does facilitate spiritual and psychological wholeness through the healing process.¹⁸⁷

The Deck of Reconciliation

Though relationships, love, and life can be marred by the scars of hurt, God has a plan of reconciliation that will restore joy to the wounded heart.¹⁸⁸ Reconciliation is the crossroads of dissociation and restored fellowship with God and others. The gospel gift of reconciliation is found in peace.¹⁸⁹ Reconciliation occurs when spiritual experiences and deep relationships meet at regret and grace. This allows a person to engage in a deep relationship and experience the openness to let oneself be touched by God or another person, which often entails some regret and even remorse.¹⁹⁰ The need for reconciliation reflects the choice to exercise one's God-given faith potential, put hope in action, and love God, others, and oneself, which gives evidence of God's faithful presence in a person's life.¹⁹¹ Forgiveness and reconciliation are self-evident. Both

¹⁸⁵ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 96–97.

¹⁸⁶ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 162.

¹⁸⁷ Gingrich, "Sexual Abuse and Dissociative Disorders," 248–249.

¹⁸⁸ Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart*, 157–158.

¹⁸⁹ Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling*, 119.

¹⁹⁰ Renz, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 84.

¹⁹¹ Asa R. Sphar and Argile Smith, *Helping Hurting People: A Handbook on Reconciliation-Focused Counseling and Preaching* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 97.

require certain inner and outer qualities that proceed from a new perspective and hope.¹⁹²

Reconciliation is not about revenge or overcoming evil with evil; it is overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:17–21). Paul uses the term “overcome” as a military term that means “to defeat, conquer” (Rom 12:21). In other words, either one will be defeated by evil, or one will conquer evil by responding to evil with good.¹⁹³ Timothy Keller uses Romans 12:14–21 to present five ways to overcome evil with good. Two of these ways specifically apply to the building bridges method of building healthy relationships. First, the injured person must pray for those who have hurt them or done evil to them, because it is hard for an individual to stay angry at someone if he or she is praying for them (v. 14). Secondly, the person must forgive those who have hurt them or done evil to them because forgiveness is turning away from the pursuit of revenge or desire to repay evil for evil (v. 17).¹⁹⁴

The rebuilding of positive relations orientation toward a shared future between formerly hostile parties denotes reconciliation.¹⁹⁵ Reconciliation almost always necessitates forgiveness from the injured person or restitution from the offender. An act of reconciliation will not heal all the relational scars left by a traumatic experience, but it will help ease the guilt and anger associated with these past experiences to allow the person to build healthy relationships.¹⁹⁶ All guilt, regrets, and unreconciled relationships are not induced by trauma, but even nontraumatic hurt leads to the same lasting relational scars as traumatic events if not addressed and reconciled when possible.¹⁹⁷ Connecting the disconnected to God and others can be negatively impacted

¹⁹² Renz, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 30.

¹⁹³ Keller, *Forgive*, 190.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 192–193.

¹⁹⁵ Wenzel, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace,” 322.

¹⁹⁶ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 418.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 513

when the hope of reconciliation diminishes.

A three-stage model used in reconciliation-focused counseling addresses the problem (i.e., areas of alienation), the goals (i.e., targets of reconciliation), and the strategies (i.e., a movement toward restoration and reconciliation) needed to cultivate a vision of hope.¹⁹⁸ Mutual satisfaction of psychological needs (e.g., power, status, respect, belonging, identity, and moral integrity) is a facilitator of reconciliation.¹⁹⁹ The first step in reconciliation is rebuilding broken trust and confidence in a relationship, which can only happen over time through reestablishing emotional connection, engaging in honest dialogue, and exhibiting predictable patterns of behavior.²⁰⁰

Trust is easily broken and often difficult to rebuild after a breach of trust in a relationship, but the success of reconciliation depends on whether one's trust is trust-busting (one's response to pain is defensive, hurtful, or retaliation) or trust-building (one's response to pain is grace and kindness).²⁰¹ The capacity to reconcile a relationship is rooted in empathy and the ability to feel together mutually.²⁰² The act of forgiveness does not guarantee reconciliation, but it helps facilitate the process of reconciliation because without forgiveness, there is no reconciliation.

The Process of Maintaining Healthy Relationships

After a bridge is built or reconstructed, there is a continual process of maintaining and inspecting the bridge to ensure the connection from one side of the bridge to the other remains safe and healthy. This same process needs to be intentionally implemented to maintain healthy

¹⁹⁸ Spfar and Smith, *Helping Hurting People*, 86–87.

¹⁹⁹ Wenzel, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace," 323.

²⁰⁰ Kelley, Waldron, and Kloeber, *A Communicative Approach to Conflict*, 115.

²⁰¹ Ripley and Worthington, Jr., *Couple Therapy*, 312–316.

²⁰² Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 133.

relationships. Spiritual formation and human development must coincide in one's maturation process that unfolds across a lifetime of building healthy relationships.²⁰³ Two aspects of spiritual formation and healthy relationships are intentional spiritual discipline and ongoing discipleship. Both require an intentional, ongoing effort, continual self-inspections, and relationship-building to be healthy and effective in building a healthy church.

Intentional Spiritual Disciplines

Intentional spiritual disciplines are essential for spiritual maturity. The pursuit of spiritual discipline is a process of maturity and not an event.²⁰⁴ Maturity is necessary for maintaining healthy relationships, but disconnection can delay, disrupt, or even halt the development of maturity.²⁰⁵ Spiritual disciplines are not intended to be spiritual exercises that express duty or performance but a privilege to be used (1 Tim 4:7–8).²⁰⁶ The goals of spiritual disciplines are holiness, righteousness, self-control, and a renewed knowledge that allows individuals to put off anger and wrath and put on kindness and humility (Col 3:8–14).²⁰⁷ If the mind is preoccupied, deceived, or damaged by strongholds, then God's truths are not perceivable without intentional spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines allow believers to imitate Christ through godly behavior (Eph 2:10) and be transformed into godly disciples through cognitive (e.g., meditation, prayer, discernment) and behavioral disciplines (e.g., fasting, chastity, body care, etc.).²⁰⁸ Spiritual disciplines enable

²⁰³ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 263.

²⁰⁴ Anderson, Zuehlke, and Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy*, 169–170.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 51.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 55.

²⁰⁸ Ian F. Jones, "Christian Formation of the Self Strategies," 214.

believers to build responsibility, accountability, and credibility that coincide with the liberty to evaluate one's spiritual progress in accountability groups.²⁰⁹ The combination of spiritual disciplines and healthy relationships provides sound counsel (Prov 27:9), sharpens one's moral character (Prov 27:17), and demonstrates loyalty (Prov 17:17) and trust (Ps 41:9).²¹⁰ The corporate domain (i.e., community and worship) provides an opportunity for growth and accountability through participation and practice.²¹¹

Christians cannot maintain spiritual growth without relationships. Building relationships through growth groups or small groups encourages participants to make progress in their walk with Christ, which means building one's spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines that include upward (i.e., loving God), inward (i.e., loving one another), and outward (i.e., loving one's neighbor) continual growth.²¹² The purpose of groups is to allow Christians to inquire into the inward state of others in the group, which will foster spiritual growth through accountability and spiritual disciplines.²¹³

These groups help create healthy relationships, but it is the individual's responsibility to maintain growth through these relationships. The same spiritual disciplines used by a pastor or counselor are available to all who are willing to plan for a lifetime of learning and dedication through mindful reflection and practice.²¹⁴ Groups cannot replace one's spiritual disciplines and

²⁰⁹ Howard Hendricks, "foreword to," *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 9–10.

²¹⁰ Gordon Johnson, "Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 94.

²¹¹ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 261–162.

²¹² Rod Dempsey, "Accountability," in *Spiritual Formation Is ...How to Grow in Jesus with Passion and Confidence*, eds by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 185–186.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹⁴ Pamela Couture, "A Beginner Can Be 'Good Enough': Seven Spiritual Disciplines of Pastoral Care and Spiritual Psychotherapy," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 32, no. 2-3 (2022):140–149.

vertical relationship with God, but the fruits of one's spiritual disciplines are meant to be shared with others through healthy relationships and healthy churches.

Ongoing Discipleship

Relationships and ongoing discipleship must coincide with one another. Discipleship is about association and connections and has never been biblically described as a solo act for isolated Christians.²¹⁵ Association in discipleship that follows Jesus' example is meant to establish and build ongoing relational connections with those who are responsive to the call of Christ.²¹⁶ Mark Devers suggests that engaging in discipleship means orienting one's life toward others by laboring for the sake of others, just as Jesus did. This labor of love is at the heart of discipleship.²¹⁷

The foundation of discipleship is relationships, and one cannot communicate with mere words what is required in a discipleship relationship. Ongoing discipleship requires more than classroom teaching, it requires one's whole life to be an example of one who trusts and follows Christ.²¹⁸ Discipleship focuses on transformation and multiplication.²¹⁹ Every disciple of Christ must have a heart of servanthood and humility, which goes against the very nature of man. Ongoing discipleship requires a personal crucifixion or death to self that allows a person to focus far more on the needs of others than on the needs of oneself.²²⁰ The same intentional effort it

²¹⁵ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 158.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158–159.

²¹⁷ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 27.

²¹⁸ Dever, *Discipling*, 39–40.

²¹⁹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 113–115.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

takes for spiritual disciplines to produce spiritual maturity and holiness should be applied to ongoing discipleship that requires one to deny self, take his or her cross, and follow Christ (Matt 16:24, Mark 8:24, Luke 9:23).

Discipleship helps create a culture of accountability through community.²²¹ J. T. English notes, “Community is not discipleship, but discipleship cannot happen without community.”²²² Disciple-making is equipping other church members to work together as a team to form a disciple-making community because every Christian should be a disciple-maker.²²³ Ongoing discipleship thrives on honest accountability through relationships (e.g., small groups, accountability partners, or community).²²⁴

God has given everyone the capacity for connectedness, but a life that brings joy will only flourish in healthy relationships that begin within the community.²²⁵ Fellowship within a community of believers is something Christians cannot live without because God uses people to form people.²²⁶ Group accountability develops one’s credibility and promotes the freedom and responsibility to be a disciple of Christ, which leads to healthy relationships.²²⁷ Every ministry of the church should funnel people toward a discipleship environment through relational small groups.²²⁸ The shift in focus from activity to relationship will allow each ministry to align with

²²¹ J.T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 200.

²²² *Ibid.*, 204.

²²³ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 118–119.

²²⁴ Hendricks, “foreword to,” *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 9–10.

²²⁵ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God’s Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 183.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

²²⁷ Hendricks, “foreword to,” *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 9–10.

²²⁸ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 171.

the overall goal of making disciples not to be competitors but to form a harmonious group of believers with the primary mission of discipleship.²²⁹

The foundation of ongoing discipleship and relationships is love. A love that brings life and connectedness into relationships promotes an atmosphere for discipleship.²³⁰ Loving relationships create a bridge that begins the discipleship process and communicates the gospel. The bridge of relationships provides a way for the Word of God to travel to the disconnected.²³¹ The personal connections made through ongoing discipleship are the building blocks to healthy personal and spiritual relationships. Ongoing discipleship begins with being a follower of Jesus Christ and having healthy relationships with other believers to help bridge the gap to the unsaved.

Theological Foundations

Healthy relationships are a significant key to healing the hurting, growing spiritually, and building a ministry at FBC-GA. God did not intend for Christians to grow or hurt alone but to grow, edify, love, and heal through healthy relationships. Biblically, God is the creator and sustainer of all relationships, and God's Word provides the blueprint for building and maintaining healthy relationships. God's Word also provides a blueprint for building a healthy church through healthy relationships in Ephesians 4:7–16, which describes a model for Christians and churches.

²²⁹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 171.

²³⁰ Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, 184–185.

²³¹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 156.

The Foundation of Relationships

God's relationship with His creation and its creatures is formulated in the creation narrative in Genesis.²³² The foundation of relationships did not change with the inception of sin because God and His love never change, but the Fall of man and the immediate consequence of sin (Gen 3) disrupted relationships by introducing an alienation between God and man.²³³ This disconnection in relationships also exists between man and man, which brings pain and blighted relationships due to the long-term effects of sin.²³⁴ Cain and Abel (Gen 4), Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–34), and Nehemiah and Sanballat (Neh 4:1–8) are a few biblical examples of the type of blighted and bitter relationships that lead to disconnection between man and man.

Conversely, Noah's relationship with God was defined by his continual and habitual walk with God (Gen 6:9).²³⁵ God's blessings and promises to Abram were an invitation to a spiritual relationship with God that impacted Abram's relationship with others (Gen 12:2–3).²³⁶ Solomon's relationship with God was evident in the questioning of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1). These three examples demonstrate that Noah, Abram, and Solomon had the foundation of a healthy relationship with God after the Fall of man.

Paul addresses the gap between the relationally disconnected and the relationally connected by the seat of their emotions (e.g., anger, bitterness, or forgiveness) in Ephesians

²³² Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, eds. David G. Firth and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 27, ProQuest eBook Central.

²³³ Gordon J. Wenham and James D. G. Dunn, "Genesis," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019), 44. ProQuest eBook Central.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

²³⁵ Steinmann, *Genesis*, 92.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 144–145.

4:31–32.²³⁷ The disconnection develops when a person begins to harbor resentment about one's past, which produces outwardly expressed human anger and rage toward others.²³⁸ On the other hand, the church, as a community of believers, connects by building relationships based on kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness, which reflects a deep love toward one another, which is the foundation of relationships.²³⁹

Building Healthy Relationships

The four major principles of building healthy relationships are love, forgiveness, trust, and hope. While these principles are not mutually exclusive, they provide the substance with which to build the foundation and support piers for bridges. First, love is a biblical principle that is the foundation of all relationship-building. Scripturally, believers are to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and walk in love (Eph 5:2) to portray Christ and manifest the love of Christ toward fellow believers by showing genuine forgiveness (Eph 5:1–2).²⁴⁰ God designed the church to be a family of believers that are fitly joined together through edification and love (Eph 4:15–16).²⁴¹ The foundation of relationship-building is love because it begins with a vertical relationship with Christ. This vertical relationship is inextricably linked with horizontal relationships with fellow Christians (Col 1:4).²⁴² Love is the bonding agent that allows one's spiritual center, which is

²³⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 634–639.

²³⁸ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 307.

²³⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians*, Vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries eds. Eckhard Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 145.

²⁴⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 309.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

²⁴² G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 35–36.

one's vertical relationship with God, to connect to the volitional, intellectual, and emotional aspects of the person to form a psychical unity with others by being knit together in love (Col 2:2, 3:14).²⁴³ Real love is sincere, whole-hearted, and gospel-centered not hypocritical, ritual, performed out of duty, or marked by mere platitudes (Rom 12:9–10).²⁴⁴ A gospel-centered love that allows the gospel rather than the world's customs to shape one's mind and relationships (Rom 12:1–2) is what needs to saturate FBC-GA.²⁴⁵

Most importantly, the New Testament reveals that God is the source of love (1 John 4:7–8, 16) that gives mankind the ability to experience and express the fullness of love in all relationships. God provided the greatest example of love and what it can cost when He gave His own beloved Son as a sacrifice for sinners (John 3:16, Rom 5:8, 8:32).²⁴⁶ Jesus mandates that all Christians should love one another (John 13:35), which is further emphasized in a human-divine relationship that is rooted in love and not fear (1 John 4:18–21).²⁴⁷ A church member cannot authentically claim to love God without loving those within the beloved community of believers (2 John 1: 4–6).²⁴⁸

Forgiveness is another biblical principle that is vital to building relationships. Paul teaches his audiences the importance of forgiving one another by providing Christ through God's act as an example (2 Cor 2:7–10, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13). There is no greater example, motivation,

²⁴³ Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 154.

²⁴⁴ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Christ-Centered Exposition, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2021), 203.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 202–203.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁴⁷ Paul N. Anderson, *Commentary on 1-3 John*, The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary, eds. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2019), 25, ProQuest eBook Central.

²⁴⁸ Anderson, *Commentary on 1-3 John*, 31.

or pattern for forgiving others than God's forgiveness of sins through Christ.²⁴⁹ Jesus provides complete forgiveness of sin through His atoning death (Heb 8:12). Christ brings a genuine and lasting forgiveness that creates a transformation in believers that is based on the sacrificial work of Christ.²⁵⁰ This forgiveness allows individuals to have confidence and boldness to enter the presence of God because of the work of Christ as the High Priest (Heb 4:14–16).²⁵¹ The confidence and boldness of man do not come from human virtue but from God's grace.²⁵²

In addition, Jesus also provides instruction on forgiveness in His model prayer (Matt 6:9–13, Luke 11:2–4), in His teachings (Matt 6:14–15, 11: 25–26). Jesus not only commanded forgiveness in His teaching but lived it by becoming the offering so that mankind could have forgiveness of sin (Rom 5:8). Christ provides an example of forgiveness that goes far beyond restoring what Adam lost by forgiving the multitude of transgressions of all sinners, by providing the gift of eternal life, and by giving people a clean state before God (Rom 5:12–21).²⁵³

Furthermore, forgiveness is the core divine attribute that brings a person into God's community (Eph 1:7, 4:32, Col 3:13) and allows Christ to willingly take on that which sinners deserve to clear a path for the transformation to a new life.²⁵⁴ Forgiveness not only points to the continuing character of Christ (Matt 18:21–22, Luke 17:3–4), but it also implies that being forgiving is being gracious.²⁵⁵ The qualifier to receive God's forgiveness is to forgive others, and

²⁴⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 309.

²⁵⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, vol. 36, *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 254.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Yarborough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2018), 290–91.

²⁵⁴ Bock, *Ephesians*, 145.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the chief evidence of a penitent heart toward God is a forgiving spirit.²⁵⁶ Conversely, a lack of forgiveness will hinder one's relationship with God and others (Matt 6:15, 18:21–35).

Thirdly, trust is a principle of action that builds on one's faith. Trusting God can help restore one's trust in others. A godly trust provides a sanctuary for the believer (Isa 8:14) and confidence in God's promises that were being fulfilled by Christ (Heb 2:13).²⁵⁷ Jesus taught the multitude not to worry about their lives because worrying does not add anything to one's life span (Matt 6:25–27). Worrying is pointless, fruitless, and foolish and it affects one's relationships with God and quality of life.²⁵⁸ Individuals who worry often indicate that they do not adequately know God, do not trust Him, or have not yielded to Him.²⁵⁹ Jesus can be trusted unconditionally by those who choose to follow Him.²⁶⁰ The benefit of godly trust is freedom from self and a cure for worry and anxiety, which allows individuals to build a healthy relationship with God that can influence one's relationship-building with others.

Lastly, hope is a biblical principle that provides an anchor for healthy relationships. The author of Hebrews uses the term "hope" as the soul's anchor (Heb 6:19). The Christian's hope is firm and secure because of the faithfulness of God in exalting His crucified Son to heaven.²⁶¹ The presence of hope is confirmed by God's Word as a promise directly from God (Heb 6:11).²⁶² This hope is an inviolable promise of God that is intended to give strong encouragement to

²⁵⁶ Danel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount*, Christ-Centered Exposition, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2019), 90–92.

²⁵⁷ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 101–102.

²⁵⁸ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount*, 104.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 103–104.

²⁶⁰ Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, 112.

²⁶¹ David G. Peterson, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, eds. Eckhard J. Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 169.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 164.

believers and not an abstract truth unrelated to life.²⁶³ The assurance of hope is found in the presence of God (Heb 6:19); nothing can dislodge this hope from the believer (John 10:28–29) because hope is an objective reality (e.g., faith, truth).²⁶⁴ The reliability of God’s Word provides the assurance for the promise of hope.²⁶⁵ This promise of hope is secured by Christ as the High Priest who has entered heaven on behalf of all mankind to open the way to heaven for all who believe in Christ as their personal Savior (John 3:15–18, Acts 2:21, 16:31, Heb 6:13–7:28).²⁶⁶

Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Maintaining healthy relationships involves a community of faithful believers. The Old Testament believers had a covenant relationship with God based on their faith and obedience to God that affected their level of joy, their relationship with one another, their service to God, and their testimony toward unbelievers (Deut 4:6; Neh 8:14-18).²⁶⁷ The New Testament establishes the church as the community of believers to equip and edify the saints and work together as to maintain a healthy and holy church (Eph 4:12–16). The church is to build itself up in love as a growing organism consisting of living believers.²⁶⁸

Healthy relationships are maintained by equipping oneself for spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10–20) and the verbal, physical, and internal assault of the enemy (Neh 4).²⁶⁹ Believers were

²⁶³ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 203.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 203–204.

²⁶⁵ Peterson, *Hebrews*, 164

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ T.J. Betts, *Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 111–112.

²⁶⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 578.

²⁶⁹ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 57–65.

never meant to function as individuals but to work properly with each other.²⁷⁰ The disconnection that comes from intense pressure from the enemy produces isolation and withdrawal from God's Word and the community of believers, which leads to unhealthy relationships.²⁷¹ However, Nehemiah prayed to God to help the people of God (Neh 4:9) do what they could not do themselves, but God had already provided the resources needed to finish the work of building the walls of Jerusalem, which were His mind and the community of faith (i.e., healthy relationships within the body of believers).²⁷²

The church's responsibility is to put on the armor of God (Eph 6:10–17), and the church is also supposed to equip believers for the battle by watching out for and praying for each other (Eph 6:18).²⁷³ The church is the body of Christ, and its members build relationships by exhorting one another to tell the truth rather than lies because the harmonious human relationship has no room for lies that poison communication, breed suspicion, and break the bond of mutual trust.²⁷⁴ The institution of the local church cannot be disconnected from discipleship because the local church is the tool and primary avenue through which God intends to make and form disciples into mature followers of Christ.²⁷⁵ Believers need to remain connected to the local church as the body of believers where Christ reigns as head and opportunities to build up one's faith and maturity thrive.²⁷⁶ Paul's exhortation to the church of Colossae was the believer's relationship with outsiders (Col 4:5), but Paul exhorted the church of Ephesus to move toward relationships

²⁷⁰ Bock, *Ephesians*, 131.

²⁷¹ Betts, *Nehemiah*, 63.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 62–63.

²⁷³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 530, ProQuest eBook Central.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

²⁷⁵ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 52.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 52–53.

within the community.²⁷⁷

The maintenance of healthy human relationships begins with a healthy relationship with Christ. A healthy relationship that instills the love of Christ can be maintained by all believers because nothing can separate the believer from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). The love of Christ constrains the believer to part from the former ways of self-centeredness and live for Christ by His principles and mandates (2 Cor 5:14–15).²⁷⁸ Paul uses the term “in Christ” seventy-six times in the dative form to indicate an association with Christ that suggests “in relation to Christ.” When individuals become a new creature in Christ, they are in relation to Christ (2 Cor 5:17).²⁷⁹ A relationship with Christ also introduces the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–21). The concept of reconciliation is expressed in both verbal and noun forms in 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 and represents a re-establishment of an interrupted or broken relationship or an exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship.²⁸⁰ A relationship with Christ helps individuals to win the battle of the mind because the mind is the control center of all that one thinks or does.²⁸¹ Paul expressed to the church of Ephesus that the putting on of the new man brings about the renewed spirit of the mind, which indicates an inward change (Eph 4:22–24). The old man and the new man are positions, but the renewing of the mind is a continual state.²⁸² This same thought is repeated in Colossians, but the emphasis is on the people in the community.²⁸³

²⁷⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 436.

²⁷⁸ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 307–308.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 309.

²⁸¹ Anderson, Zuehlke, and Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy*, 386–387.

²⁸² Bock, *Ephesians*, 137.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 138.

One's relationship with Christ produces a daily renewal of the inward man (2 Cor 4:16). Paul indicates that persecution, trouble, and affliction (2 Cor 4: 8–10, 17) are temporal things that may affect the outward appearance but beautifully reveal the inwardness of the believer that produces faith and hope in eternal things.²⁸⁴ In other words, Paul could experience spiritual renewal through the unseen immeasurable glory in the eternal, while visibly suffering for the gospel temporarily.²⁸⁵ This daily renewal positively affects the spirit of the mind. Paul also encourages the Romans to let the new thought patterns transform their lives and not allow their minds to be shaped by the world (Rom 12:1–2).²⁸⁶

Furthermore, Paul encourages his audience to be like-minded, of one accord, and to maintain a mind of Christ (Phil 2:1–5). Paul describes unity in Philippians 2 as spiritual oneness that was also presented to the church of Colossae (Col 1:10).²⁸⁷ This spiritual oneness is possible when believers have the same love of Christ and a soul-joined oneness (Phil 2:2) that is not focused on intellectual uniformity but on the whole frame of the mind.²⁸⁸ This like-mindedness or spiritual oneness that Paul speaks of indicates God's blueprint for maintaining relationships with others, which starts with having the mind of Christ and continues with the unity with believers (Phil 2:3–5).

The connection of unity means that believers are to continually strive to be fitly joined together while Christ remains the glue that holds the body of believers together (Eph 4:16). Believers are not to allow shame, guilt, or bitterness to prevent them from maintaining their

²⁸⁴ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 269.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁸⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 622–623.

²⁸⁷ Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed., eds. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 86–87.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

relationships with God and the body of believers.²⁸⁹ When a person has a new identity in Christ, he or she does not pursue hostility, selfishness, or paths of destruction as the world does because the believer's new identity represents Christ, and he or she is to live accordingly by maintaining healthy relationships (e.g., through forgiveness and kindness) with others (Eph 4:32).²⁹⁰

Building an Ephesian 4:7–16 Model Church

Developing healthy relationships within FBC-GA will coincide with building a healthy church, and the measuring stick for gauging a healthy church is Ephesians 4:7–16. Paul incorporates the metaphor of working together to build a building into this passage. The phrase “the whole body fitly joined together” (Eph 4:16, King James Version) illustrates the necessity of each stone being smoothed by the stone master to form a building.²⁹¹ This building is the church, and the stones are each member's gifts, which are being used to equip other members and glorify Christ as the head of the church. Spiritual maturity is primarily relational and is rooted in love, as a spiritually mature person reflects the love and character of Christ.²⁹² Healthy relationships are built on love, unity, and maturity, which are vital to the health of a church.

The members of a healthy church build up each other in love (Eph 4:16). Love is a spiritual command that cannot be carried out in isolation from the body of believers. The church is designed to be a community for believers that encourages individual and corporate maturity through love and unity.²⁹³ A model church is filled with Christ and seeks conformity to Christ by every member, which indicates that every member of the church body needs to have a growing

²⁸⁹ Bock, *Ephesians*, 131.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145–146.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 131–132.

²⁹³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 272.

relationship with Christ.²⁹⁴

Paul alludes to the importance of diversity in gifts in his letter to the congregants at Ephesus (Eph 4:7–16). The individual gifts contribute to the unity and maturity of the church (v. 13) and remain integral for the individual and for unity within the church body (v. 16).²⁹⁵ The individuals of the church make up the whole body of the church and cannot be fitly joined together without healthy relationships. Paul envisions a healthy, growing church, which can only exist when the body of believers utilizes the gifts of all members of the body (Eph 4:1–16).²⁹⁶ The proper function of every member is crucial to a healthy and spiritually maturing church because relationships must be formed to equip the saints and edify or build up the body of Christ (v. 12), and to increase the body (v. 16).²⁹⁷

Theoretical Foundations

This action research thesis builds on the foundation that all individuals experience brokenness and vulnerability, leading to some variance of disconnection. A problem exists when prolonged disconnection plagues an individual's relationships, both spiritual and personal. Building bridges of new relationships is a solution for disconnection but is not a new field of study. The building bridges concept is mainly developed around education, counseling, and the past hurt or traumatic events in one's life. The Building Bridges workshop intends to help believers build new relationships by focusing on the future positive aspects of relationships instead of past hurts, counseling, and experiences. Relationships build up the broken and

²⁹⁴ Emmanuel D. Mbennah, *The Mature Church: A Rhetorical-Critical Study of Ephesians 4:1–16*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 90.

²⁹⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 436.

²⁹⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 272.

²⁹⁷ Mbennah, *The Mature Church*, 82–83.

vulnerable through love, trust, hope, and forgiveness because one's weakness brings dependency on God and others.²⁹⁸ The theoretical foundation research of building bridges examines some of the current scholarly work on vulnerability, models of forgiveness, models of self-forgiveness, and models of hope. The theories and models reviewed will provide valuable insight into disconnection and connection pertaining to relationships with others and the need for a Building Bridge workshop at FBC-GA.

Vulnerability

Brokenness and vulnerability are not only the conditions most people are in when they get saved, but they are the conditions that most people reach before they can address the condition of their relationships. Brokenness, damage, and imperfection are common to all humanity, but lead to the vulnerability needed to change.²⁹⁹ Vulnerability involves elements of existential human feelings, uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure that lead to discomfort due to ambiguity and uncertainty, which can bring tolerance and the ability to embrace the unsettledness.³⁰⁰

Broken and vulnerable individuals do not have to experience severe personal trauma to experience disconnection. Disconnection is a problem that affects not only one's image of oneself as different, a victim, or an outsider but also one's relationship with those who were once close.³⁰¹ The primary solution to disconnections that produce negative emotions is to build new

²⁹⁸ Faller and Wright, *True Connection*, 77.

²⁹⁹ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. updated and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 118.

³⁰⁰ Ian Dore, "Seeing Anew: Drawing on Psychosocial Approach to Consider Vulnerability as a Virtue for Knowing," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 35, no 4 (2021): 438–439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2020.1835847>.

³⁰¹ Jeffery A. Kottler and Richard S. Balkin, *Relationships in Counseling and the Counselor's Life* (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 2017), 85.

relationships that bring positive emotions and outcomes, but relationships alone will not produce lasting changes without factoring in one's character, commitment, and motivation to maintain healthy relationships.³⁰² Maintaining healthy relationships requires an intentional act of spiritual discipline and discipleship that builds from the inside out.

A vital aspect of maintaining relationships is discipleship. The hard work of discipleship is necessary for a person to let go of unbiblical ways of living and broken relationships. The disconnection of broken relationships often causes conflict, anger, lack of trust, and lack of vulnerability, which can all be overcome when one desires to deny oneself and follow Christ as a disciple.³⁰³ Discipleship offers individuals the brokenness and vulnerability to break free from the power of the past and embrace the future.³⁰⁴ Discipleship allows church members to build relationships through their vulnerabilities by releasing God's love and power upon others.³⁰⁵

Models of Forgiveness

Forgiveness comes from a tender heart, and Christ provides the ultimate model of forgiveness through His instruction and example (Matt 18:32–35, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13). Forgiveness goes against one's sense of justice, but the freedom of forgiveness gives one the ability to live with the consequences of someone else's sin.³⁰⁶ God is not out to get individuals. Conversely, God seeks to restore individuals, and forgiveness is the way to restore individuals from bitterness, rage, and

³⁰² Kottler and Balkin, *Relationships in Counseling*, 86.

³⁰³ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, 172–173.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

³⁰⁶ Anderson, Zuehlke, and Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy*, 156.

anger.³⁰⁷ Several emerging theories of forgiveness have emerged in recent studies.

Two major forgiveness models are Worthington's REACH forgiveness model and Enright's process model.³⁰⁸ REACH forgiveness is a Christian-based model that allows the Holy Spirit to build forgiveness into one's Christian character.³⁰⁹ The REACH forgiveness model begins with decisional forgiveness while moving toward emotional forgiveness.³¹⁰ This five-step model ends with an encouragement to revisit decisional forgiveness. Any forgiveness model must acknowledge that wisdom is necessary when discussing biblical forgiveness and reconciliation.³¹¹ The REACH forgiveness model shapes helping people forgive around the concept that is comparable to building a concrete structure. One cannot pour concrete onto a floor and will it into a perfectly shaped pillar but everyone needs to count on God to pour the last concrete of forgiveness into their lives.³¹² Forgiveness provides for oneself and others a release of guilt, remorse, regret, and ruminations.³¹³

Enright's process model is a forgiveness phase model that consists of four phases: an uncovering phase, a decision phase, a work phase, and a deepening phase that helps others resolve anger and restore hope.³¹⁴ Enright looks to confront anger, admit shame, and bring awareness to depleted emotions to produce permanent changes.³¹⁵ Forgiveness therapy is based

³⁰⁷ Anderson, Zuehlke, and Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy*, 155.

³⁰⁸ Worthington, Jr., "Understanding Forgiveness of Other People," 17–18.

³⁰⁹ Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley, "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies," 424.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 426.

³¹¹ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 381.

³¹² Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley, "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies," 421–422.

³¹³ Kottler and Balkin, *Relationships in Counseling*, 89.

³¹⁴ R. D. Enright and R. P. Fitzgibbons, *Forgiveness Therapy: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 20–22.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61–64.

on the understanding that a client has been wronged, has been hurt, or wishes to do something about their past, both emotionally and psychologically.³¹⁶ This is not the focus of the Building Bridges workshop, but it is crucial to understand the emotional and psychological value of forgiveness in the relationship-building process.

Richard Balkin introduces a third model of forgiveness. A Forgiveness Reconciliation Model and Inventory gauge the best method of connection after disconnection through the process of forgiveness.³¹⁷ The Forgiveness Reconciliation Model is a four-step process that assists individuals in identifying the thoughts, feelings, and events related to the offender and the transgression, providing a pathway toward forgiveness.³¹⁸ The Forgiveness Reconciliation Model's effectiveness often depends on one's perception of past events and beliefs about forgiveness and reconciliation, which may dictate how one responds emotionally and behaviorally.³¹⁹ Forgiveness models will be used in the Building Bridges workshop to help participants build the support piers of relationships, increase understanding, and practice techniques for self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others.

Timothy Keller developed a fourth model of forgiveness. His comparison of "costly grace" to secular models of forgiveness offers a clear distinction between models.³²⁰ First, the individual must recognize that forgiveness is vertical and acknowledges their need for and reception of forgiveness from God.³²¹ The costly grace of forgiveness was paid by Christ. Faith

³¹⁶ Enright and Fitzgibbons, *Forgiveness Therapy*, 61.

³¹⁷ Balkin, *Practicing Forgiveness*, 50.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

³²⁰ Keller, *Forgive*, 28.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

in Jesus Christ and the gospel gives believers the resources necessary to receive forgiveness from God and give it to others.³²² The costly grace model of forgiveness is a biblically based model with both a horizontal and a vertical dimension.³²³ The cost of forgiveness is found in humility, joy, and love portrayed through Christ's life. Joseph is an example of one who had enough humility and joy to forgive by repaying evil with good (Gen 50:19-21).³²⁴ Finally, extending forgiveness can bring about the reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships, which is the horizontal dimension of forgiveness.³²⁵

On the other hand, the secular models of forgiveness consist of the nonconditional forgiveness model (cheap grace), the transactional forgiveness model (little grace), and the no-forgiveness model (no grace), which all lack a vertical dimension.³²⁶ Secular societies formulate models of forgiveness by emphasizing the victim's liberation from anger or the perpetrator's merit of forgiveness, in which the victim gives up anger if the wrongdoer extends acts of repentance and reparation.³²⁷ The no grace model abandons forgiveness in favor of the victim's pursuit of justice.³²⁸ Conversely, the use of more directive spiritual interventions (e.g., prayer) can enhance the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions.³²⁹

³²² Keller, *Forgive*, 121.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 28.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 131–134.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ Randolph K. Sanders, "Addressing Spiritual and Value Issues in Therapy," In *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Psychologists, Therapists, and Pastors*, 2nd ed., ed. Randolph K. Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 220–221.

Models of Self-Forgiveness

Models of self-forgiveness are being established to help individuals alleviate guilt and negative emotions associated with unresolved interpersonal offense or trauma. Most researchers agree that self-forgiveness is relevant when one has transgressed against one's own values, which typically creates some sense of self-condemnation associated with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral sequelae.³³⁰ The most notable model for self-forgiveness is the Dual Process Model of Self-Forgiveness, which utilizes the dual dimensions of reorientation and esteem restoration, which parallel decisional and emotional forgiveness.³³¹ This dual process allows counselors to explore the relationships between the three responses to a violation of one's own values (i.e., genuine self-forgiveness, self-exoneration, and self-condemnation).³³²

Brandon Griffin suggests that the Dual Process Model extends the Social Cognitive Theory of moral behavior by envisioning self-forgiveness as a moral repair strategy carried out through self-regulation.³³³ Griffin et al.'s study led to the development of a measure to align with the Dual Process Model, as Griffin et al. conducted studies concerning the four possible responses to one's own wrongdoing: self-forgiveness, self-exoneration, self-punishment, and self-inhibition.³³⁴ One of the purposes of this study was to determine the validity of a tool that assesses value reorientation and esteem restoration as they pertain to predicted offense-related

³³⁰ Lydia Woodyatt and Michael Wenzel, "Chapter 3: The Psychology of Self-Forgiveness," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds. Everett L. Worthington, Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade (New York: Routledge, 2019), 22, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

³³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³³ Brandon J. Griffin et al., "Development of the Self-Forgiveness Dual-Process Scale," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 65, no. 6 (2018): 716.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 717.

rumination.³³⁵ Marilyn Cornish and Nathaniel Wade present the four Rs of genuine self-forgiveness as a therapeutic model.³³⁶ These four components of responsibility, remorse, restoration, and renewal form a model that is based on theoretical and empirical literature on self-forgiveness and provide a complete picture of the self-forgiveness process.³³⁷

Forgiving oneself tends to be more difficult than forgiving others and can be challenging, even if hurt is from another person's wrongdoing. A lack of self-forgiveness can begin in childhood and remain into adulthood because of self-blame or self-criticism due to the individual concluding that they should have done something to stop the traumatic event or wrongdoing.³³⁸ The first step in self-forgiveness is seeking divine forgiveness, after which a person can seek to repair the social and psychological damage associated with wrongdoing.³³⁹ Moral guilt is satisfied by God's forgiveness, but the lasting consequences and self-condemnation lead to a need for self-forgiveness and the responsibility to deal with one's wrongdoings.³⁴⁰

The interdependent process of moral repair and self-forgiveness is another model of self-forgiveness. This process of self-forgiveness can create positive outcomes by reducing adverse effects, stress, and rumination.³⁴¹ Self-forgiveness promotes moral and relationship repair through trust, self-trust, empathy, and a willingness to reconcile.³⁴² Moral repair is a dual process

³³⁵ Griffin et al., "Development of the Self-Forgiveness Dual-Process Scale," 715.

³³⁶ Marilyn A. Cornish and Nathaniel G. Wade, "A Therapeutic Model of Self-Forgiveness with Intervention Strategies for Counselors," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 93, no. 1 (Jan 2015): 97.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

³³⁸ John N. Briere and Catherine Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment*. 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 154.

³³⁹ Worthington, Jr., Sandage, and Ripley. "Forgiveness-Focused Strategies," 418.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ Wenzel, et al., "Dynamics of Moral Repair," 608.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

that includes emotional release from self-condemnation and moral reform through facing wrongdoing.³⁴³ This moral engagement leads to genuine self-forgiveness and typically requires time and effort to work through one's actions and responsibilities, which can help restore one's moral and social self.³⁴⁴ Self-forgiveness is not simply making oneself feel better but understanding and taking responsibility.³⁴⁵

A third model of self-forgiveness involves relational theories that move individuals toward relationally constructive self-forgiveness. The three most significant relational theories that apply to self-forgiveness are attachment theory, differentiation of self, and intersubjectivity.³⁴⁶ A brief look at each of these relational theories reveals that Attachment Theory explains how a particular relationship style makes self-forgiveness more likely through self-development, differentiation of self overlaps with attachment theory but provides a systemically nuanced way of understanding disconnection and connection in relationships, and intersubjectivity is the ability to see or recognize the self and others rather than objects that move toward surrender or letting go of self.³⁴⁷ Attachment theory posits the idea that secure relationships restore one's perception of safety and love in a relationship after hurt, destruction, and isolation caused by trauma.³⁴⁸ Self-forgiveness does not require knowing about relationships;

³⁴³ Wenzel, et al., "Dynamics of Moral Repair," 608.

³⁴⁴ Lydia Woodyatt, Michael Wenzel, and Melissa de Vel-Palumbo, "Working through Psychological Needs Following Transgressions to Arrive at Self-Forgiveness," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness*, eds. Lydia Woodyatt, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Michael Wenzel, and Brandon J. Griffin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2017), 49.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49–51.

³⁴⁶ Elizabeth G. Ruffing et al., "Self-Forgiveness in Couple and Family Therapy," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness*, eds. Lydia Woodyatt, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Michael Wenzel, and Brandon J. Griffin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2017), 195.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 195–198.

³⁴⁸ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 132.

it requires knowing oneself and learning how to build relationships in a new, healthy way.³⁴⁹

Models of Hope

One of the most common models of hope is the hope theory. Hope theory is a goal-directed behavior that focuses on the cognitive-motivational process and is not explicitly affective or emotional.³⁵⁰ Hope directs individuals toward a goal-directed behavior by subdividing hopeful cognitions into the will and the way of one's goals.³⁵¹ Hope varies from the typical conceptualization of hope that reflects optimism, wishes, wants, and desires in the uncertainty of future outcomes by allowing affective, cognitive, or motivational behaviors, or a combination of the three, to direct one's goals and hope.³⁵² Studies have shown that hope and improved outcomes had mixed results and do not always correlate to improving hope or outcomes (e.g., academic success, PTSD, impairment symptoms). The goals most associated with hope theory are those that serve as context for specific pathways, goals that serve as outcome measures, and goal outcomes that provide feedback about one's goal-pursuit possibilities.³⁵³

The Hope Scale is a twelve-item self-report scale designed to measure dispositional hope. The Hope Theory relates hope scores to activate neural regions of thought to direct one's goal-directed behavior, motivation, and problem-solving process.³⁵⁴ The Hope Scale has not received

³⁴⁹ Hawkins and Clinton, *The New Christian Counselor*, 133.

³⁵⁰ Nathaniel Geiger et al., "Untangling the Components of Hope: Increasing Pathways (Not Agency) Explains the Success of an Intervention That Increases Educators' Climate Change Discussions," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 66 (2019): 2.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Jennifer S. Cheavens et al., "Hope, Goals, and Pathways: Further Validating the Hope Scale with Observer Ratings," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 14, no. 4 (2019): 453.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 452.

much attention due to its limited extant research that depends primarily on the self-reporting of participants concerning their perception of the quality of their goals and pathways.³⁵⁵ The Hope Scale has been implemented in secondary schools and colleges worldwide to evaluate students' hope, positive expectations, and motivations for the future.³⁵⁶ Sevda Asian developed a twenty-seven-item Hope Scale from her observations.³⁵⁷ One's level of hopelessness is linked significantly to age, and the chance of hopelessness increases as family members increase. These findings can be attributed to adolescents from lower-income families.³⁵⁸ A hope scale score for a non-Christian at best will be five or six on a ten-point scale because hope is only a temporary easement of the pain of everyday problems. The score can only increase when eternal or spiritual hope has been received (Rom 8:35–37).³⁵⁹

On the other hand, the hope-focused model provides HOPE interventions to obtain skills and behavioral traits to reach one's intended outcome or goal.³⁶⁰ *Handling Our Problems Effectively* is a strategy for change implemented through behavioral-based interventions.³⁶¹ Jennifer Ripley and Everett Worthington, Jr., provide fifteen HOPE interventions. These interventions include love, prayer, focus on Christian virtues, and stopping negative reciprocity.³⁶² Negative reciprocity is a relationship stressor that begins with one

³⁵⁵ Cheavens, et al., "Hope, Goals, and Pathways," 454.

³⁵⁶ Sevda Aslan, "Development of the Hope Scale for Secondary School Students: Validity and Reliability Studies of Scale 1," *International Journal of Education and Psychology in the Community* 9, no. 1 (July 2019): 29.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵⁹ Richard A. Fowler and Natalie Ford, *Grace-Based Counseling: An Effective New Biblical Model*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2021), 66, ProQuest eBook Central.

³⁶⁰ Ripley and Worthington, Jr., *Couple Therapy*, 208–237.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 210–237.

negative action followed by a negative reaction that fuels a negative cycle of continual negativity with increased fury, which explains an individual's hostile or brutal behavior within a relationship.³⁶³ LOVE is a hope-focused intervention for problem-solving in relationships. LOVE is an acronym for Listen and repeat, Observe effects, Value Partner, and Evaluate common interest.³⁶⁴ A Hope-Focused Model can redirect one's obsessive ruminations of the past by focusing on the inwardness of a renewed hope that can turn one's attention into positive thinking and new healthy relationships.³⁶⁵

An alternative model of hope is a grace-based model of hope that entrusts in the unchangeable nature of God, human response, and God's grace.³⁶⁶ The grace factor links grace to truth and extends hope to one's connection with God and others.³⁶⁷ Grace plus truth are essential components of the grace-based model that leads to hope.³⁶⁸ Hope can be restored in the grace-based model through God's unchanging truth and word extended through grace. The acronym for GRACE stands for God's image, Rebellion, Altruism, Connection, and Empowerment.³⁶⁹ The connection in grace-based counseling is linking grace to the truth as a nonnegotiable component in counseling.³⁷⁰

³⁶³ Ripley and Worthington, Jr., *Couple Therapy*, 233.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 216–217.

³⁶⁵ Colier, *Can't Stop Thinking*, 32–33.

³⁶⁶ Fowler and Ford, *Grace-Based Counseling*, 38.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 85–92.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66–71.

Conclusion

In summary, this action research thesis formulated and implemented the Building Bridges workshop at FBC-GA to address the problem of relational disconnection caused by hurt that remains after counseling. The workshop is intended to equip, engage, and encourage church members to bridge the interpersonal gap from relational disconnection to connection by applying the building bridge metaphor to their spiritual formation and personal and spiritual relationships.

The workshop will teach attendees how to inspect, plan, build, finish, and maintain healthy relationships. The most crucial aspect of building healthy relationships in the Building Bridges workshop is building a solid foundation of love, which requires a vertical relationship with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. A bridge's support system (i.e., support piers and anchor plates) is built on the foundation and establishes vertical strength so horizontal elements (i.e., central span and deck) can be built. Likewise, building relationships with God requires a vertical support system (i.e., the foundation of love, the support piers of trust, and the anchor plates of hope). This vertical or spiritual support system is critical to building horizontally (i.e., the central span of forgiveness and the deck of reconciliation). The horizontal aspect of healthy relationships supplies a platform and deck for the models of forgiveness, self-forgiveness, and hope of reconciliation with self and others. The building process is not complete without a maintenance plan. The Building Bridges workshop incorporates the concept of intentional spiritual discipline and ongoing discipleship to maintain healthy relationships within the church.

The theological foundation of building relationships begins by establishing a solid foundation of the love of Christ. Next, healthy relationships are built on a solid foundation

through forgiveness, trust, hope, and reconciliation. The final stage is to maintain healthy relationships by understanding the importance of the community of believers, equipping and edifying one another, and having a healthy relationship with Christ. Healthy relationships cannot thrive without a transformation of the inward man as a new creature, which comes from a healthy relationship with Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Ephesians 4:7–16 provides a model of how to build a healthy church through healthy personal and spiritual relationships.

The theoretical foundation provides an understanding of how an individual's vulnerability can lead to healthy relationships. Forgiveness helps release guilt, shame, and regret that hinder healthy relationships. Self-forgiveness promotes moral and relational repair for individuals suffering from shame and disconnection. Hope brings about a sense of positivity and motivation for goals and developing healthy relationships. A believer's hope is secure in the unchanging truth of God, His Word, and His grace. Ultimately, forgiveness, self-forgiveness, and hope influence the process of building healthy relationships and current behaviors by building bridges that connect the disconnected to God and others at FBC-GA.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Previous counseling, five years of observation, and the review of current literature review indicate the presence of relational disconnection and a lack of healthy relationships. The Building Bridges workshop is a method to help the church members of FBC-GA move toward healthy relationships. This process takes a plan, time, and a team because building relationships cannot be completed without a plan or alone. The Building Bridges workshop has five stages that are covered over nine weeks. The five stages are formulated for FBC-GA members and include a three-step building process for building healthy relationships. The bridge's substructure, superstructure, and deck correlate with methods to build healthy relationships. Each stage is in a specific order that cannot be altered or rushed. Building bridges and relationships takes time, and each stage is vital to a bridge project's overall structure or the health of a relationship.

The Causby Road Bridge in Burke County, North Carolina, is being used as a metaphor in the Building Bridges workshop. This bridge was built in the late 1950s and recently received a poor to imminent failure rating in an inspection. The NCDOT initiated and implemented a plan by communicating with bidders and the public years before the expected six-month project that is currently underway began.¹ A recent picture of the Causby Bridge reconstruction project shows it has entered the second and third stages of the building process. This second stage is the construction of the superstructure, and the third stage is the building of the deck (Figure 1).

The substructure (i.e., foundation, support piers, and anchor plates) and the superstructure (i.e., central span) are the essential support systems for the connecting stage of building a bridge (i.e., deck construction). The workshop, workbooks, and questionnaires drew parallels between many aspects of bridge building and the Causby Road Bridge construction project. The

¹ "Upgrades Coming to Bridge Over I-40 in Burke County," NCDOT, last modified July 12, 2022. <https://www.ncdot.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/2022/2022-07-12-new-bridge-i-40-burke-county.aspx>

workshop focused on allowing participants the opportunity to implement the skills to build a bridge into skills for life, from disconnections of life to the connection of healthy relationships.



Figure 1. Causby Road Bridge construction project, September 2023. Photo courtesy of John Terry

Intervention Design

The Building Bridges workshop is designed for the members at FBC-GA as an intervention to connect the disconnected to God and others after counseling. The workshop used class participation, self-reflection, and focus groups to help participants build healthy relationships with God and others. The purpose of this type of workshop is to mimic some of Paul's writings to the churches of the New Testament as he used metaphors related to events and themes common to the surrounding culture (1 Cor 9:24, 26; Gal 5:7; 1Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7). The workshop was approved by the deacons at FBC-GA (See Appendix A). The workshop was based on the metaphor of building a bridge, and this intervention design consisted of four parts: the kickoff, the workshop, the workbook, and the data evaluation process.

The Kickoff

A kickoff luncheon was held on December 16, 2023, in the fellowship hall at FBC-GA. The luncheon was promoted through a bulletin insert two weeks prior to the kickoff event and was announced two Sundays before the event (see Appendix B). The flyer in the bulletin was also mailed to all members with the date, time, and place of the kickoff event. The free luncheon provided an opportunity for the researcher to present the need and purpose of the workshop and for participants to register, and sign letters of consent. After lunch, a thirty-minute presentation on the Building Bridges workshop was given.

The presentation addressed an ongoing problem of disconnection at FBC-GA, which suggests that unresolved hurt has caused much of the disconnection experienced in relationships, even after individuals have attended counseling. The purpose of the workshop is to connect the disconnected to God and others by building bridges of healthy relationships in the same way a healthy church is built. The kickoff presentation emphasized building new bridges of relationship and not dwelling on the debris of past or current hurt.

The Building Bridges workshop began with the story behind the rebuilding of the Causby Road Bridge in Burke County, North Carolina, which introduced church members to a rebuilding process that will repair interpersonal gaps and help participants move from relational disconnection to connection. The presentation on the Building Bridges workshop includes a brief look at the five stages of building bridges (Figure 2), the importance of the order of the states, and how these same stages can be used to build healthy relationships.



Figure 2. The five stages of building bridges

After the presentation was completed, some of the requirements of the workshops were discussed. First, participants must be age eighteen or older. The discussion of the age requirement also brought an opportunity to discuss the confidentiality of all those who attend. The researcher emphasized that any information provided (age, gender, or time preference), participation in the workshop, self-reflection, or focus group input was voluntary. Names, prior counseling, and current issues were not discussed or inquired about in the workshop sessions, reflection time, focus groups, or evaluation process. This workshop focused on building healthy relationships that connect the disconnected to God and others after counseling.

The registration form (see Appendix C) allowed each participant to sign up for the workshop, identify his or her age range, agree to the time commitment, and volunteer for a focus group that was conducted at the end of the workshop. During registration at the luncheon, the participants signed a letter of consent (see Appendix D). This legal consent form assured each participant that all data collected would be kept private and anonymous. The legal consent form also acted as a letter of commitment from those who signed up for the Building Bridges workshop to attend and participate in each workshop session for the duration of the nine weeks.

This workshop required a nine-week commitment that included two focus groups and an evaluation process at the end of the workshop (Table 3.1). The workshop was tentatively scheduled to begin during the third week of January 2024 at 7:00 p.m., and the kickoff allowed church members an opportunity to suggest the best night and time for better attendance. Also, church members who could not attend an evening class had an opportunity to attend a morning or a Saturday class if there were at least ten who were willing to participate. Since there were only sixteen individuals who signed up for the workshop during the kickoff, a second opportunity was given to sign up for the workshop the Wednesday night before the first session.

Table 3.1: Overview of the sessions for the Building Bridges workshop

Stage	Session	Title	Focus
Stage 1	Session 1	The initial inspection stage	The pre-planning stage: The reality of disconnections and the need for connections
Stage 2	Session 2	The blueprint	The planning stage: Spiritual relationships and Personal relationships
Stage 3	Session 3	Phase One: Laying the foundation	The building stage: The foundation of love
	Session 4	Phase Two: Build the support piers	The building stage: The support piers of trust
	Session 5	Phase Three: Attach the anchor plates	The building stage: The anchor plate of hope
	Session 6	Phase Four: Build the superstructure	The building stage: The central span of forgiveness
	Session 7	Phase Five: Build the Deck	The building stage The deck of reconciliation
Stage 4	Session 8	The Final Inspection	The final building stage: Building healthy relationships (Eph 4:7-16 model)
Stage 5	Session 9	Maintaining the Structure	Maintenance Stage: Maintain healthy relationships through spiritual disciplines and discipleship
Evaluation	Reflection session 1	Focus group 1	Determine efficacy
Evaluation	Reflection session 2	Focus group 2	Determine efficacy
Evaluation	Reflection session 3	Questionnaires	Determine effectiveness and efficacy

The results from the signup sheet indicated that twelve individuals desired a Saturday morning class and that eleven others chose either Tuesday or Thursday night. After conferring with these individuals who chose a night session, they agreed to meet on Tuesday night at 7 p.m. At the kickoff, the researcher's goal was to get at least twenty-five participants to commit to the nine-week workshop because the researcher anticipated that some participants who signed up would not be able to complete the workshop. Recruiting twenty-five participants allowed for

some loss in attendance without the sessions dropping below the needed twenty participants, approximately the number of attendees at a Wednesday night service. Church members who wanted to attend the workshop but did not attend the kickoff luncheon were required to sign the registration form and letter of consent before the first session.

Lastly, the number of workbooks needed to be printed for the workshop was predetermined by the researcher. The researcher ordered thirty copies prior to the kickoff due to holidays and the uncertainty of printing time. Only registered participants were allowed to attend, participate, and receive a workbook for the workshop. The evaluation process will use the questionnaires and focus groups comprised of church members and faithful attendees who are registered for the Building Bridges workshop.

The Workshop

The Building Bridges workshop used the metaphor of building a bridge to better equip FBC-GA participants to develop and maintain healthy relationships. This workshop covered five specific areas of bridge building and used a current bridge under construction in the community as a visual aid to help participants better comprehend the process. The kickoff luncheon was held three weeks before the first session of the workshop and provided the number of participants for the workshop, those willing to participate in a focus group, and the number of workbooks needed. The workshop consisted of nine one-hour sessions held over nine consecutive weeks.

Session One

The Causby Road Bridge project began with an inspection using the National Bridge Inventory Rate Scale established by the Federal Highway Administration) and the NCDOT. Likewise, the Building Bridges workshop started with the inspection stage in session one. This

first session will consist of four segments (see Table 3.2). The first segment discussed the reality of disconnection, the prominent causes of prolonged disconnection (e.g., shame, guilt, anger, and bitterness), and the results of prolonged disconnection (e.g., withdrawal, isolation, dissociation, and secrecy). The second segment discussed the reality of connections, God’s plan for connection, and how building bridges requires connections with others. Bridges and relationships are not intended to be built alone. The key to healthy relationships is connecting the disconnected to God and others. Segments one and two comprised a forty-minute class.

Table 3.2. Session one: The initial inspection stage

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Reality and Causes of Disconnections	30 minutes
Part 1	Defining disconnection	10 minutes
Part 2	Understanding shame, guilt, anger, and bitterness	10 minutes
Part 3	The results of prolonged disconnect	10 minutes
Two	The Reality and Need for Connections	10 minutes
Part 1	The need for one’s vertical relationship	5 minutes
Part 2	The need for one’s horizontal relationship	5 minutes
Three	The Initial Inspection Questionnaire	10 minutes
Part 1	Explanation of questionnaire	2 minutes
Part 2	Filling out the questionnaire (anonymous)	8 minutes
Four	Reflection on Session One	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

During the third segment of the first session, the initial inspection questionnaire was handed out, and participants were allotted ten minutes to complete it (see Appendix E). The results of this questionnaire were compared to the results of the final inspection questionnaire in session eight, which coincides with the completion of the first four stages of the bridge-building process. The first four stages are the initial inspection, plan, building stages, and final inspection, while the fifth stage deals with maintaining the bridge of healthy relationships. The fourth segment of the first session ended with a ten-minute reflection session that allowed time for each participant to ask questions or discuss the material from the initial inspection stage. This reflection session also allowed participants to write in the journal portion of the workbook. The

journal portion of the workbook is a private and personal space that was not intended to be an open forum. The journal portion was changed to a homework assignment after the first week. Journaling is the first step in learning to reflect and inspect one's inner emotions without judgment.

Session Two

The planning stage involves the creation of a blueprint. The results of the inspection completed during the first session determined the need for a new project. The focus of the workshop is building new relationships that do not bring the debris from the old bridge of relationships into the new construction of healthy relationships. The goal of this workshop is to help participants form a pattern of positive emotions through the planning and building of new relationships that help them move forward from the negative reciprocity and ruminations that often remain long after a traumatic event. The second session consisted of three segments (see Table 3.3).

The blueprint session included a thirty-minute segment and a twenty-minute segment, as well as a ten-minute reflection period at the end of the session. Ephesians 4:31–32 was introduced as the Scriptural reference for the workshop in part one of segment one. The first segment discussed the need for connection through spiritual relationships. The presence of an intentional plan for building a healthy relationship with God will determine the strength of one's relationship with God and one's ability to worship corporately. The second segment discussed the need for a connection through personal relationships with a spouse, family, and others outside the church. Building healthy relationships must be an intentional effort, but before one can start building the bridge to healthy relationships, there must be a plan.

The reflection session gave participants time to write self-reflection notes or questions in their workbooks and, if so desired, share their findings with the group. This session helped participants evaluate their willingness to begin building relationships. This reflection session addressed the questions and material of session two. This session also began the fifty-minute class session time and ten-minute reflection time structure that was used until week eight's final inspection.

Table 3.3. Session two: The blueprint or planning Stage

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship	30 minutes
Part 1	Building Bridges Bible verse – Eph 4:31–32	5 minutes
Part 2	Planning for a healthy relationship with God	5 minutes
Part 3	Establishing a blueprint for a healthy relationship with God	20 minutes
Two	Blueprint for Personal Healthy Relationships	20 minutes
Part 1	A blueprint for one's horizontal relationship	15 minutes
Part 2	The importance of connecting to others	5 minutes
Three	Reflection on Session Two	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Three

After the inspection and planning stages were complete, the building stage commenced, which consisted of five phases that reflected the three elements of bridge construction. The three elements are the substructure, superstructure, and deck. Construction on a bridge must begin with a substructure that becomes the vertical support system for the horizontal structure (i.e., central span and deck). The substructure was the focus of the next three sessions, and the first element of the substructure was the foundation. The most crucial step in the bridge-building process and the most important step in building healthy relationships is laying the foundation.

The first session of the building stage focused on laying the foundation, which consisted of two segments (see Table 3.4). The first segment of the third session was composed of one

fifty-minute segment with five parts. This session established God’s love through the work of Jesus Christ as the primary building block and that Jesus commanded believers to love God and to love one another. This session introduced the foundations of one’s emotions by using the iceberg model to illustrate the importance of setting a foundation deep beneath the surface (see Appendix G). The foundation for healthy relationships is love.

The last ten minutes of this session was a reflection session during which participants could fill out the journal portion of their workbooks. The participants were encouraged to fill out the questions and notes sections of the workbook while the class was in session. The reflection section was meant to be completed during the ten-minute reflection. The reflection time is an opportunity for voluntary input from the participants in session three.

Table 3.4. Session three: The building Stage – laying the foundation of love

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Foundation of Love	50 minutes
Part 1	The foundation of one’s emotions – iceberg model	10 minutes
Part 2	The importance of a solid foundation	10 minutes
Part 3	The foundation for building bridges of healthy relationships is love	10 minutes
Part 4	Pouring the foundation with the love of Christ	10 minutes
Part 5	Setting the foundation of love	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Three	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Four

The next stage of the workshop built on the foundation of love that was established in session three. The second phase of the building process is building the support piers of trust and faith. Faith is trust in action, and the support piers of trust is vital to building healthy relationships. One’s faith is always related to trust, but the focus of this session was on trust and building relationships. While other support piers could be considered, trust is most critical to

relationship building at this stage of the building process. This session still focused on the substructure and consisted of two segments (see Table 3.5).

The fourth session begins with a fifty-minute segment that combined both faith and trust into one lesson of understanding the importance of trusting God, who has never failed nor forsaken anyone. Most people identify with broken trust, but this session is focused on building trusting relationships that start with God and then with others. There is no healthy relationship without trust. Trust in oneself is confidence in God's Word and promises and not based on one's merit or goodness. The last segment will be allotted for a ten-minute reflection session. This is not a time to reflect on broken trust but a time to reflect on how the support piers of trust will impact one's relationship with God and others. The support system for building relationships begins with a foundation of love and support piers of trust.

Table 3.5. Session four: The building stage – building the support piers of trust

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Support Piers of Trust	50 minutes
Part 1	Building trust in God	20 minutes
Part 2	Building trust in others	10 minutes
Part 3	Building trust in oneself	10 minutes
Part 4	Building broken trust	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Four	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Five

The third phase of the building stage is building the anchor plates of hope. Anchor plates may not be necessary for all bridge constructions, but they are instrumental in building healthy relationships. This session elaborates on an anchor that is steadfast and sure as the anchor of one's soul (Heb 6:11–19). The fifth session includes two segments that focus on the anchor of hope (see Table 3.6) The first segment is a fifty-minute segment addressing the source of hope. The sources of hope are God's promises, God's Word, and Jesus Christ.

The anchor of hope that is established in Jesus Christ is the kind of hope that one can build healthy relationships. Hope secures the substructures of love and trust in a relationship. Hope looks forward with anticipation and strengthens and anchors the support piers of trust and faith. Hope allows individuals to look forward with great promise. Rebuilding broken trust begins with anchoring one's soul in the hope of Jesus Christ (Heb 6:19).

The last ten minutes of the fifth session was a period of reflection that allowed participants to add to their reflective journals and answer questions related to hope as the anchor plate of healthy relationships. Each reflection session is meant to build on the previous session so that at the end of the building stages, participants can complete the final inspection based on his or her notes on self-reflection.

Table 3.6. Session five: The building stage – Attaching the anchor plates of hope

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Anchor Plates of Hope	50 minutes
Part 1	Anchored in hope	10 minutes
Part 2	Anchor in God's promises (Heb 6:11–16)	10 minutes
Part 3	Anchor in God's Word (Heb 6:17–18)	15 minutes
Part 4	Anchor in Jesus Christ (Heb 6:19)	15 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Five	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Six

The fourth phase of the building stage begins with the construction of the superstructure. This is the area of support between the substructure and the deck. While there are several aspects of the superstructure, this workshop focused on the final stage of the construction of the superstructure, which is the building of the central span. After the central span is put in place and the substructure is completed, the building of the deck can commence. The central span of forgiveness is the focus of this session and begins the connection between the vertical (one's relationship with God) and horizontal (one's relationship with others). While there are other

spans that could be considered in this session, forgiveness was the most prominent issue covered in the literature review.

Session six contained one segment on forgiveness and one segment for reflection (Table 3.7). The first segment of this session comprised a fifty-minute lesson covering three crucial parts of forgiveness. The central span of forgiveness looks at forgiveness and God, forgiveness and others, and self-forgiveness. Forgiveness is key to connecting to or feeling the disconnection in one's relationships. The deck cannot be complete without a central span, and a relationship is not complete without forgiveness. Forgiveness and self-forgiveness are key elements in building relationships.

Table 3.7. Session six: The building stage – Building the central span of forgiveness

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Central Span of Forgiveness	50 minutes
Part 1:	Forgiveness - God	20 minutes
Part 2:	Forgiveness - others	10 minutes
Part 3:	Forgiveness - self	20 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Six	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

The second segment was a ten-minute reflection session that provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on this session's subject of forgiveness and how crucial forgiveness is in completing the superstructure. The support for the bridge and relationships had been established at this point of the workshop, and some of this reflection time allowed participants to focus on the need to build or establish all the components of support before moving to the connection stage. A point of emphasis in the reflection time was that the superstructure is often unseen when bridges are completely constructed, but without a final central span, a deck cannot be built, nor support the required weight. This is also true in relationships. While forgiveness may not be seen

or evident, it is crucial in the horizontal aspect of relationships to the support of the final product of healthy relationships.

Session Seven

Building the deck must be the last phase of building the bridge, as the substructures and superstructure of love, trust, hope, and forgiveness must be in place for the deck to be built. Session seven is the deck-building stage, the final phase of the bridge-building process. Building the deck represents building healthy relationships through reconciliation. Reconciliation is not forgiveness, but it is often associated with forgiveness. God's plan of reconciliation must be recognized as the source of reconciliation before reconciliation is connected to trust, hope, and forgiveness. God provided reconciliation for all mankind by the death of his Son (Rom 5:10), and the ministry of reconciliation through Him (2 Cor 5:18).

The final stage of the building process bridges the gap between disconnection and connection. The substructure, superstructure, and deck are complete and ready for inspection. Likewise, the bridge to healthy relationships (i.e., love, trust, hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation) is ready for inspection. The vertical and horizontal plans created two are now completed in this final building stage.

This final session in the building stage focused on the connection stage and consisted of two segments. The first segment, fifty minutes long, focused on building healthy relationships through reconciliation (see Table 3.8). The second segment was a ten-minute reflection session that provided participants an opportunity to share their questions, reflections, and evaluations of reconciliation from session seven. The superstructure and deck are closely related in the final building stages, and the close nature of forgiveness and reconciliation in the building relationships was offered as a reflection point.

Table 3.8. Session seven: The building stage – Building the deck of reconciliation

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Deck of Reconciliation	50 minutes
Part 1	Introduction to reconciliation	10 minutes
Part 2	God’s plan of reconciliation	10 minutes
Part 3	Connecting reconciliation and trust	10 minutes
Part 4	Connecting reconciliation and hope	10 minutes
Part 5	Connecting reconciliation and forgiveness	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Seven	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Eight

The eighth session centered on the fourth stage of the bridge-building process. Every bridge undergoes a final inspection that determines the quality of work and the completion of the bridge project. A final inspection confirms that the blueprints were accurately followed, that no shortcuts were taken to complete the process of building bridges or relationships, and that there are no structural weaknesses. A final inspection is needed for credibility, durability, accountability, and sustainability.

Session eight was divided into three segments (see Table 3.9). The first segment was forty minutes long and discussed how to build healthy relationships according to Ephesians 4:7–16. The models of equipping each other, edifying the body of Christ, and loving each other were the focus of the first segment. The last part of the first segment focused on the fitly joined together model (Eph 4:16). Participants were instructed and equipped to build healthy relationships that will lead to healthy churches by following Paul’s model of equipping, edifying, and fitly joining together. The final inspection stage for the workshop served as an indicator of the progress the participants made during the Building Bridges workshop.

The second segment provided participants time to fill out the second questionnaire, the final inspection questionnaire (see Appendix F). This inspection is similar to the questionnaire

used in week one. The intent was for the participants not to review their week one inspection until the final inspection was completed. This is a way to ensure a more honest and accurate rating on the scale model. These questionnaires were stapled and turned in without names on them to be reviewed by the researcher. The final segment was a reflection session on Ephesians 4:7–16 and how individual healthy relationships are a key to corporate worship and a healthy church. The questionnaire was not to be discussed during the reflection session but was a part of the evaluation and efficacy sessions after the workshop was completed.

Table 3.9. Session eight: The final inspection stage – Building an Eph 4:7–16 model

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Building an Eph 4:7–16 Model	40 minutes
Part 1	Equipping each other model (Eph 4:12)	10 minutes
Part 2	Edifying the body of Christ model (Eph 4:12)	10 minutes
Part 3	Loving each other model (Eph 4: 15–16)	10 minutes
Part 4	Fitly joined together model (Eph 4:16)	10 minutes
Two	Final Inspection	10 minutes
	Complete the final inspection questionnaire	
Three	Reflection on Session Eight	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Session Nine

The last session of the Building Bridges workshop focused on the maintenance of the bridge. Bridge maintenance is essential for prolonging the lifespan and ensuring the reliability of a completed bridge.² Regular inspections, even after the final inspection, are important proactive measures designed to pinpoint minor issues and structural weaknesses and evaluate the safety and durability of each bridge.³ The same proactive measures need to go into maintaining healthy relationships with God and others.

² Ammar Ahmed, “Essentials of Bridge Maintenance and Inspection,” ATI Construction Products (blog), December 19, 2023, <https://ati-constructionproducts.com/blog/essentials-of-bridge-maintenance-and-inspection/>.

³ Ibid.

Healthy relationships are built on spiritual formation, which requires spiritual discipline. Spiritual formation focuses on human participation and obedience to Jesus Christ but is still a means of God's grace; it is not merit that brings transformation.⁴ Spiritual development is a whole-body experience in Christian formation (see Appendix H). The spiritual aspect of human development is the foundation or substructure on which the bridge of healthy relationships is built. The moral aspect of human development is the pressure point and the main carrying element that is built onto the foundation and support tiers. The emotional aspect of human development is the joint between the moral and mental aspects that rely on a solid foundation for support. The physical and social aspects of human development are the bridge deck and the barrier where the outward and corporate domain of spiritual disciplines thrives. Once a bridge is constructed, each piece becomes one cohesive unit that can be used for its intended purpose.

Spiritual formation is the foundation of human development (Figure 3). The inward domain of spiritual disciplines (i.e., prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, fasting, and silence) is focused on the development and transformation of the inward part of each participant in the workshop. The outward domain of spiritual disciplines is focused on building bridges using a social and behavioral aspects of human development that allow participants to corporately practice their healthy relationships with others (i.e., through worship, spiritual direction, and celebration).⁵ Spiritual formation is the continuing of the whole-body experience that incorporates all the components of human development through spiritual disciplines. In other words, life is more than a trip it is a journey of faith that connotes the process and passages in one's response to God's overture toward the individual that views his or her life as a whole.⁶

⁴ Maddix, "Chapter 8: Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 242.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 260–62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.

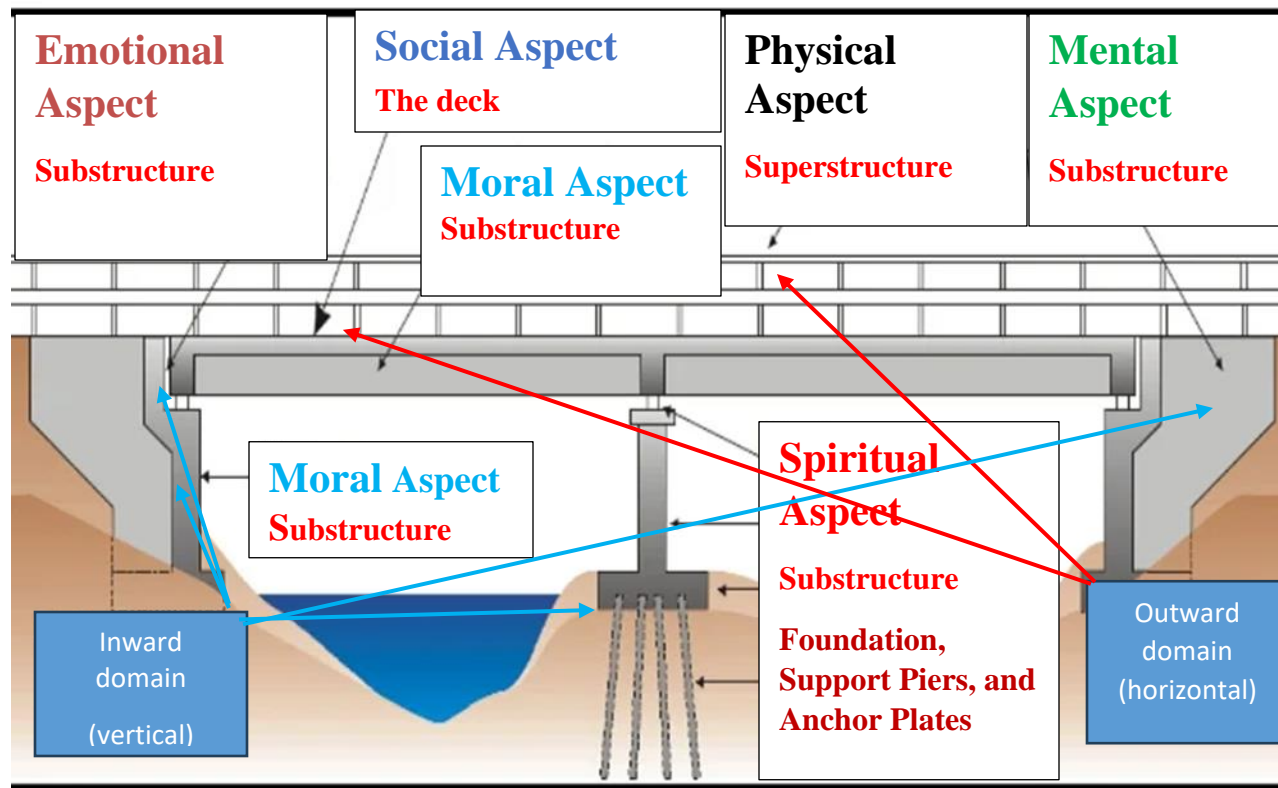


Figure 3. Six aspects of the human person

This fifth stage of bridge construction is an ongoing process that cannot begin until the final inspection is completed. The maintenance stage requires a repetition of actions to uphold a high standard of performance through intentional and ongoing spiritual disciplines. The last session included three segments (see Table 3.10). The first segment established the connection between human development and spiritual formation through an introduction to intentional spiritual disciplines. The ability to maintain healthy relationships is dependent upon one's spiritual discipline and discipleship. These spiritual disciplines include prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, and journaling. While journaling may not be considered a spiritual discipline for some Christians, it is an excellent way to record daily the events surrounding one's spiritual discipline. Journaling is the focus of the reflection section for each session and provides each participant the opportunity to practice journaling for nine weeks.

The second segment provides an introduction to community and spiritual formation through ongoing discipleship. Discipleship is an important component of maintaining healthy relationships. Ongoing discipleship is about relationships and is a great indicator of healthy relationships and healthy churches. The emphasis of this segment is community, accountability, and responsibility for maintaining healthy relationships through ongoing discipleship

The third segment is the last reflection session of the workshop but remains focused on session nine and the reflections and questions of the participants concerning session nine. The workbooks were not to be turned in as they are private journals that will not be shared other than through voluntary excerpts from willing participants. The workbook is designed to encourage each participant to continue reflecting and journaling the progress of his or her spiritual formation (i.e., spiritual disciplines and discipleship) and maintaining healthy relationships. A small segment of time in this segment was dedicated to the continual practice of journaling and reflecting on one's spiritual formation through intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship.

Table 3.10. Session nine: The maintenance stage

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Human Development and Spiritual Formation	10 minutes
Part 1	Aspects of human development	5 minutes
Part 2	Intentional spiritual disciplines – A call to holiness	
Part 3	Equipping self: Accountability, credibility, and spiritual maturing through healthy relationships	5 minutes
Part 4	Journaling: Learning to reflect on spiritual disciplines	5 minutes
Two	Community and Spiritual Formation	25 minutes
Part 1	Ongoing discipleship: A follower of Christ	15 minutes
Part 2	Equipping others: Accountability through community	5 minutes
Part 3	Journaling: Learning to record ongoing discipleship	5 minutes
Three	Reflection on Session Nine	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

The Workbook

The Building Bridges workbook was used as a self-reflection tool for each participant (see Appendix I). The workbook provided a way for every individual participating in the workshop to inspect his or her own life and situation without revealing intimate details of one's life to others attending the workshop. There was an allotted time for discussion at the end of each session for participants who would like to discuss their findings outwardly and willingly in a reflection session. Reflection was not intended to focus on past hurts, trauma, or counseling sessions but on the specific topic of each session in the Building Bridges workshop. The reflection session gave participants an opportunity to look at the questions and notes section of the workbook. The last section in the workbook provided space for participants to describe the topic for a specific session in his or her own words. This section was for self-reflection only and was not meant to be publicly displayed or discussed.

The workbook has nine sections that are aligned with the nine weekly sessions. Each of these nine sections is divided into three segments. First, four to five questions of reflection were provided during each session. These reflection questions were specific to the topic of the session for that specific week. The questions were intended to invoke a sentence or paragraph-style answer that digs below the surface of one's relationships to reach the inward heart of the responding participants. Secondly, the second page of each section of the workbook was split into two half pages. The first half-page segment was used for taking notes or writing questions concerning the topic of the weekly session for further discussion or documenting self-reflection that simulates bridge inspections and continual maintenance after construction or repair. This portion of the workbook was the focus of the ten-minute weekly reflection session.

The second half-page segment is the third segment of the workbook and was intended to be filled out by participants during the self-reflection session at the end of each session or completed as a homework assignment. This self-reflection session provided participants an opportunity to add a personal note of reflection each week and then learn how to use these reflections to build and maintain a bridge of healthy relationships. This last segment was not intended to be shared during the discussion sessions or focus groups. This third segment was designed to equip FBC-GA participants with the skill of journaling by the end of the workshop.

The Data Collection and Evaluation Process

The data and evaluation were collected through three reflection stages that were completed immediately after the workshop was completed. First, the questionnaires from weeks one and eight were used for personal inspection and as a tool of comparison to identify improvement over the course of the workshop. Each participant kept his or her first questionnaire until the final inspection was completed. The questionnaire from week one (Appendix E) was completed during a time of self-reflection. The participants used the rating from the initial bridge inspection to reflect on the status of their relationships. The questionnaire in week eight contained similar questions and used the same scale to allow the changes from the initial inspection to the final inspection to be assessed (Appendix F). The two questionnaires were attached and then anonymously turned in after week eight to be evaluated by the researcher. This evaluation process started immediately after the last session in week nine to allow the researcher ample time to compile and compare the data.

Data was also collected through two focus groups that were established upon registration. After a list of the names of individuals participating in the focus groups was completed, the list was split to assign each participant to a focus group. The registration form indicated that twelve

participants signed up for a Saturday workshop, and eleven signed up for a weeknight workshop. All twenty-three participants agreed to participate in a focus group. The result was that the focus groups were assigned according to which weekly session participants attended. The two focus groups meet directly after their final session. A one-hour window was allotted for each focus group. The importance of having these focus groups directly after the last session is to get evaluation data back as quickly as possible after the workshop to ensure the most accurate data.

The focus group, unlike the weekly reflection sessions, concentrated on the overall effectiveness of the Building Bridges workshop. The feedback from the focus groups on the workshop can be used to measure the effectiveness of the intervention, which was intended to instruct and equip members at FBC-GA to build and maintain healthy relationships. The focus groups were critical in gathering data to indicate how the workshop can be more effective in future workshops in helping other churches in the association and in the community. Finally, data gathered from the focus group was used to determine if an additional week or weeks should be added to the workshop to emphasize other significant elements of bridge or relationship building.

Every bridge project has a proposal with all the specifications and permits based on the data collected from previous projects. Information provided by the Building Bridges participants at registration was placed on a data sheet to compile the demographics and preferences for the workshop and future workshops (Appendix J). The number of participants who completed the initial workshop indicated that nearly sixty percent of the church did not attend the workshop in its entirety. An account of the number of participants in the workshop helps determine the need to decrease or increase participants and a possible factor in the effectiveness of the workshop. The size and number of the focus groups were based on the number of participants who

voluntarily signed up for a focus group during registration. The ratio of workshop participants to the total number of active church members indicated the need for additional workshops, the interest of the church in building healthy relationships, and whether there were enough participants in the workshop to impact the church toward building healthy relationships.

The age range of participants is important in understanding the targeted age of future workshops, and a means of invitation may be needed to target other age groups. Data on the age range of the workshop participants provide valuable insight into the possibility of adding a younger adult or even a teen workshop in the future. The age range for the workshop was expected to reflect the median age of the church's current membership. The data collected from the sign-up sheet were used for this analysis. However, the final results were based on how many church members finished the workshop and not how many signed up for it.

On the data sheets, the participants indicated their gender and marital status (married, single, or widow(er)). This information revealed the gender distribution of the ratio of participants and if the workshop effectively targeted individuals with different marital statuses. The data collected also revealed those who could only attend a morning session and determined if there were at least ten members who would commit to a morning session. The data sheet also provided a reminder of the nine-week commitment.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The intent of the intervention was to equip the participants of the workshop with the steps and tools to successfully build healthy relationships at FBC-GA, which will also become the foundation of a healthy church. The implementation of the Building Bridges workshop began with determining how the workshop would be advertised, the number of participants, the means

of presentations, and how would be evaluated to accurately determine the effectiveness of the workshop.

The Number of Participants

The implementation of the Building Bridges workshop began at the kickoff luncheon, where the date and time of the workshop were set. The sixteen people who attended the luncheon signed up for Tuesday night, Thursday night, or Saturday morning. The Tuesday and Thursday participants agreed to combine and meet on Tuesdays at 7 p.m., while the Saturday morning participants chose to meet at 11 am. Since the kickoff luncheon did not produce enough participants, a final signup was scheduled for January 10, 2024, after the Wednesday night Bible study and prayer time, which produced seven more participants. The combined sign-up efforts resulted in a total of twenty-three participants for the workshop. Four participants were not able to complete the nine-week workshop. The number of participants in each focus group was determined when sign-ups were completed. Since both weekly sessions had approximately ten participants, the decision was made to adjust the number of participants in each study group to the number of participants in each weekly session.

The number of workbooks printed was initially going to be determined by the signup sheet, but due to the upcoming holidays and uncertainty of print time, a change of plan was required. The decision was made to print thirty workbooks, and the first thirty to sign up for the workshop would be the inaugural participants. The workbook was not required for the evaluation process but was vital in the implementation of spiritual journaling, which was described in the last session of the workshop as a means of self-accountability and self-inspection. The questions in the workbook are designed to focus on each individual session and to highlight pertinent steps in building bridges of relationships. One change that was made concerning the workbook is that

the workshop instructor needed to quickly view each participant's workbook at the last session to verify the completion requirement of the workshop. The instructor selected a random chapter in each participant's workbook. The homework assignment (i.e., journaling) for each session was reviewed for completion and not content. The workbook was not collected or read in its entirety by the instructor at any point. This was not a time for judgment, comment, or acknowledgment of those participants who did not complete the homework session. The participants' completion of the workbook and attendance for all nine weeks indicated the number of participants who finished the workshop and achieved a certificate of completion from the instructor.

The PowerPoint Presentation

The outline for the workshop mimics the outlines for each session in the intervention design. Before the first session, the instructor developed a PowerPoint presentation to supplement the outline. This presentation was broken down into nine sessions and seventy slides (Appendix L). Each participant received a copy of the PowerPoint presentation so they could follow along with the weekly session. The information for the workbooks was covered in the PowerPoint presentation. The instructor's goal was to present five slides per week dedicated to the text in the outline, with a duration of about ten minutes for each slide for a total of fifty minutes. However, most sessions ended up covering six to eight slides, and two sessions only had forty minutes for the presentation. Additional slides were added for illustration and continued text that could not fit on one slide, which led to more slides and an adjustment to the time allotted for each segment of the presentation. In addition, photos were displayed on a screen to be used as visual aids during the PowerPoint presentation. Mostly, pictures of the Causby Road bridge construction, the Rocky River bridge construction, and the early stages of the construction of other bridges were used to illustrate the stages of building bridges and

relationships. Scripture verses were added to the bottom of several slides to incorporate the biblical aspect of building bridges of healthy relationships.

The PowerPoint presentation also revealed that the original outline did not have enough information to fill a fifty-minute session for seven of the nine weeks. The only two sessions that were not fifty-minute sessions were the two weeks that were limited to forty minutes so the participants could complete their inspection questionnaires in week one and week eight. The presentation and reflection time for each week revealed some possible additions or changes to the building bridges metaphor. One suggestion was to add obedience, faithfulness, and worship to the support piers of trust without adding an additional week. Another suggestion was to extend the workshop an additional week and add the spans of resilience, intimacy, empathy, and reconciliation to complement the next session on the central span of forgiveness, then follow with the deck of restoration instead of the deck of reconciliation. The central span of forgiveness was the longest session and cannot be combined with these other spans. The central span is normally the last span put in place before the deck can be completed. However, forgiveness must be taught before reconciliation, empathy, and intimacy. While the limitations of this workshop were defined by the research literature, the reflection time and preparation of the PowerPoint presentation provided excellent insight for further research and future workshops.

The Cost of the Workshop

The estimated cost to initiate a Building Bridges workshop varies depending on the number of participants and the amount of time allocated for planning and implementing the workshop in a local church setting. Food for the kickoff luncheon, printing of the workbook and PowerPoint presentation, and aerial photography were the main expenses for the workshop. First, the food for the luncheon was just under two hundred dollars for an estimated thirty to fifty

people. This cost will depend on the menu and the anticipated number of people being served. Secondly, the thirty workbooks for the workshop were printed and bound by the local UPS store at a cost of fifty-five dollars. The decision was made to print the front page in color and the rest of the pages in black and white, which cut the cost significantly. The process from format to print takes about two weeks, depending on the holidays, the number of workbooks, and the workload of the printing specialist.

The decision to print the PowerPoint presentation for each participant of the workshop was based on the desire to provide a basic outline and notes for each presentation so that each participant could concentrate on the content of the presentation and not just on notetaking. The additional photos and illustrations shown on the screen during the presentation provided visual aids and additional notes for the workbook or the printed version of the presentation. The cost of printing twenty-five copies of the seventy-slide PowerPoint presentation was \$255. This includes \$225 in ink and \$30 for paper. This cost will also vary depending on number of copies, formatting (color, black and white, presence of images), and number of slides. An option for future workshops is to outsource the printing now that the nine-week workshop and presentation have been finalized, but most copies have color, which may be an expensive option.

Lastly, the aerial photographs were taken by a professional photographer at the cost of \$75. The cost was for using a drone and not the amount of pictures taken. However, there may be additional costs for additional photos if the instructor of the workshop does not personally know the aerial photographer, as was the case for this workshop. These photos were instrumental in giving a weekly visual aid to illustrate the stages of building bridges of healthy relationships and one of these photos was used on the cover of the workbook and title page for the PowerPoint presentation. Ultimately, the cost of the workshop was an estimated \$585. This cost was

absorbed by the instructor over a five-month span, and no expenses were charged to the church or the participants of the workshop.

The Triangulation of Data

Data was gathered for this workshop from the weekly ten-minute reflection time, the participant data sheet, the initial and final inspection questionnaire, and the two volunteer focus groups that were formed during sign-ups. The effectiveness, efficiency, and practicality of the workshop were evaluated based on the data collected and suggestions of the focus groups. It was expected that not all data collected would be positive and that constructive criticism would aid in making Building Bridges into a workable workshop for any church that is striving to equip members to have healthy relationships that will lead to a healthy church.

First, the ten-minute reflection time for each session provided valuable insight into the specific topic of the session, how it was received by the participants, and how each topic or session served as a building block for the next one. Attending all of the sessions was critical for participants to be able to implement building bridges of healthy relationships. Participation in the open reflection time was encouraged but not mandatory. Questions or comments that were noted in the workbooks were addressed at this time. The data collected from each reflection session aided the researcher in making the necessary adjustments to enhance the overall quality and effectiveness of the workshop.

Secondly, the data collected from the registration form, including age, church membership, gender, and marital status, were compiled to identify specific demographics that were or were not addressed in the workshop. The other data collected were from the self-inspection. The initial and final inspections were completed in weeks one and eight. The inspections were stapled together and turned in anonymously at the end of the eighth session.

The initial inspection is a self-assessment of specific current relationships. For example, one of the questions on the initial inspection focuses on the quality of one's relationship with non-Christians. While the quality of such a relationship is not based on condoning or participating in a sinful lifestyle, it does reveal how one relates or communicates with non-believers. This question will be more applicable when the ability to build healthy relationships through discipleship is assessed in the final inspection. Discipleship requires evangelism, and one's relationship with non-Christians can provide an avenue for evangelism.

The final inspection is a self-assessment on building healthy relationships through specific relationships (questions one through three) and spiritual formation (questions four and five). The comparison of the responses to the first three questions with the results from the initial inspections helped the instructor complete a data analysis of the state of the participants' relationships before and after the building bridges sessions (i.e., sessions three through seven). The evaluation of the last two questions of the final inspection allowed the researcher to build a case for the efficiency of the workshop and the participants' readiness and willingness to build ongoing healthy relationships. The final self-inspection provides an awareness of one's relationship status through intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship. These relationships are monumental in spiritual formation and the health of the church.

Thirdly, the focus groups reviewed the entirety of the workshop and its effectiveness in equipping the members of FBC-GA to build and maintain bridges of healthy relationships. This information will be vital in fine-tuning the initial workshop and planning future workshops. The first part of the focus group discussion centered on five areas specified by the instructor of the workshop, which was followed by a ten-minute open discussion (see Appendix K). The workbook, PowerPoint presentation, reflection sessions, and visual aids were evaluated by each

focus group. The recommendations were noted and will be applied to future workshops. Since the focus groups used an open forum format, most questions and the data collected will be assessed by the instructor according to the responses of the participants. A note taker was assigned to record responses, rebuttals, or additional questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The intended result of the Building Bridges workshop was that church members at FBC-GA who participated in this workshop would be equipped with the skills to build healthy relationships with God and others. The questionnaires, workbooks, and focus groups were key in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the workshop.

The first goal of the workshop was that church members who volunteered to participate in the workshop would establish a strong foundation for healthy relationships. One of the key facts about the Causby Bridge project is that the bridge is sixty-six years old, but the repairs are still considered a rehabilitation project and not a new construction because the foundation was solid and did not need to be replaced.¹ One of the results of building relationships is equipping church members with the tools to build a solid foundation. This first step in the building process is the most critical stage of the workshop because without a solid foundation of love upon which to build the support piers of trust, one's relationship with others will crumble.

The second goal of the workshop was that church members who participated in the workshop would continue to value self-reflection through daily inspections and reflective journaling. The workshop used two inspections (initial and final), a ten-minute weekly reflection session, and a workbook to equip participants with the skills for self-reflection and self-inspection. Reflective journaling was introduced through a weekly homework assignment in each workbook that requires each participant to write a minimum of two sentences reflecting on each session. However, the maintenance lesson in session nine specifically addressed spiritual journaling. Journaling records one's spiritual discipline as a spiritual diary and ongoing

¹ "Upgrades Coming to Bridge Over I-40 in Burke County," NCDOT, last modified July 12, 2022. <https://www.ncdot.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/2022/2022-07-12-new-bridge-i-40-burke-county.aspx>

discipleship (spiritual recordkeeping). At this point, all participants would have been journaling for eight weeks without any knowledge that they were practicing spiritual journaling.

The third goal of the workshop was that church members who completed the workshop would establish a maintenance plan that includes self-inspections, intentional spiritual disciplines, and ongoing discipleship that would continue to connect them to God and others. The initial inspection, the planning stage, and the building stage of building healthy relationships are not sufficient without a final inspection, an ongoing maintenance plan, and an inspection schedule. One of the most significant intended outcomes of the workshop was that participants would continue to maintain healthy relationships, which would help the church to become a healthy church. Every time one of the participants crosses over the Causby Road Bridge or any bridge, they will be reminded of the lessons on building healthy relationships with God and others.

Collective Results

The Building Bridges workshop provides a template and tools to equip the members of FBC-GA to build healthy relationships that will result in a healthy church. While the results of the inspections, collected data, and focus group depend on participants' honest evaluation of self and engagement in the workshop, the workshop was formulated to present a step-by-step process of building bridges of healthy relationships. This process helps connect disconnected people to God and others. Each stage of building a bridge is dependent on the previous step until the project is completely finished and inspected. The Building Bridge workshop covers a five-step process over nine sessions. The intended result is to provide participants with the tools to build healthy relationships. The steps to achieve this result are an initial inspection, a planning stage, a building stage, a final inspection, and a maintenance stage.

The Initial Inspection

The initial inspection was the first session and introduced accountability through self-reflection. The Causby Bridge project was used as an example, as an inspection determined that the bridge needed significant repairs. The inspection of the Causby Bridge also determined that the substructure (i.e., foundation and support piers) was structurally sound and did not need repair. An honest assessment of one's relationships will reveal the areas of disconnection and where repair is needed. The initial inspection is the tool for self-assessment and accountability.

Outwardly, most bridges and relationships look good, but inwardly or structurally, they may be falling apart. An initial inspection goes beyond the surface. This thought remained a theme throughout the building process. The initial inspection targets the areas of disconnection that may be unknown to others but lie deep beneath one's emotional surface. This inspection provided a starting point for the planning stage, revealed the urgency for bridges of connections (i.e., healthy relationships), and explained the results if the conditions of the inspection are not addressed in the long term. One cannot repair what one does not know is broken, and the planning stage cannot begin until there is an initial inspection to identify the areas of disconnection. This was the only stage in the workshop that looked at the debris that caused the disconnect in relationships.

The Planning Stage

The second stage of building healthy relationships was the planning stage. Every bridge construction project must have a plan of execution that involves a blueprint and a timetable to start and finish the project. The planning stage builds on the initial inspection by identifying the area where repair is needed. The plan for the Building Bridges workshop involved bridging the gap from disconnected (lesson one) to connection (lessons three through eight). Part of this

planning stage is removing the debris from the old bridge so a new bridge can be built. While all the debris from old relationships cannot be immediately removed in two sessions of a workshop, the planning stage establishes a blueprint for the building of healthy spiritual and personal relationships. One crucial element of this stage is one's vertical relationship with God. There is no substitute for or shortcut around a vertical relationship with God. Every blueprint for healthy relationships must include a vertical support system that is completely finished before the horizontal portion (i.e., relationships with others) can be addressed.

In session two, participants viewed several images and an illustration of a foundation, support piers, and anchor plates (i.e., vertical support and connection) being well established before the superstructure and deck (i.e., horizontal connection) were installed. Ephesians 4:31–32 was introduced as the blueprint for connecting the disconnected to God and others. The planning stage provides the basis for the building stage. The tool needed for the planning stage is the blueprint for building relationships. This blueprint will be different for each participant depending on his or her inspection report, but the method for building healthy relationships is the same. This method begins with the building stage.

The Building Stage

The building stage consists of five phases that are influenced by the planning stage. No blueprint is of any value if it is not implemented. One important aspect of the Building Bridges workshop is the use of the tools provided to create and maintain healthy relationships. This effort must be intentional, ongoing, and timely. The building stages are intended to be completed in sequence. The first step of the building stage is establishing a vertical support system which is called a substructure. The substructure of love, trust, and hope is the vertical support system for

every relationship. If any one of these elements is missing, the relationship will be unstable and unable to bear the weight of everyday circumstances.

Building relationships requires individuals to go deep beneath the surface. The iceberg model, which illustrates human emotions, was used to emphasize this point. A bridge cannot be built without a foundation. Likewise, relationships cannot be built without a foundation of love. This love is centered around the love of Christ. A foundation of love will provide a platform for the support piers of trust and the anchor plates of hope.

The construction of the support piers of trust was the second phase of the building stage and could not begin until the foundation was set. Support piers are the connection element to the horizontal or superstructure portion of the bridge. A point of emphasis in this phase was that trusting is the principal action of one's faith and that trust in oneself really comes from completely trusting in God. One question raised during this phase pointed to how individuals can feel a bridge shake when stopped on top of the bridge and yet they still drive across it. Also, nobody gets out to test a bridge for its structural integrity, they fully trust the bridge is structurally sound and will hold up. Godly trust is instrumental in building healthy relationships.

The anchor plates of hope were established to secure the substructure of a vertical relationship and the superstructure of horizontal relationships. One observation that was made by the researcher during the study of anchor plates is that many bridges have several anchor plates attached to the vertical and horizontal support systems of bridge construction. Similarly, the anchor plates of hope can also be applied vertically (i.e., to one's relationship with God) and horizontally (i.e., to one's relationship with others). The anchor plates of hope serve as the strengthening agent for relationships.

Once the substructure is complete, the fourth phase of construction can begin. The central span connects the superstructure to the vertical support system (i.e., substructure). Likewise, the central span of forgiveness is the horizontal element of relationship building that is laid on the vertical (Certainly, spiritual) support system. The tool established in this fourth phase focused on forgiveness and God, forgiveness and others, and self-forgiveness. Certainly, pain and distrust from previous relationships can affect one's new relationships if unforgiveness is still present. This is true if a vertical support system has not been established. The superstructure is dependent on the vertical support system, just as healthy horizontal relationships are dependent on a vertical relationship and forgiveness.

The final phase of the building stage is the deck of reconciliation. The deck represents the connection point from person to person. The tools of reconciliation are intended to help individuals connect reconciliation with trust, hope, and forgiveness. The deck will always be dependent on the substructure and superstructure. Similarly, the deck of reconciliation is about relating to others and will always depend on forgiveness (i.e., superstructure), love, trust, and hope (i.e., the substructure).

The Final Inspection

The final inspection is the fourth stage of building bridges of relationships. This stage ensures that the blueprints were followed correctly and that all of the building stages were completed in the time designated. The model for the final inspection of healthy relationships is found in Ephesians 4:7–16. The ability to pass the inspection of healthy relationship-building and to build a healthy church depends heavily on following the model. The last model discussed in this session was the fitly joined together model. Each section of the bridge must fitly join together to pass the final inspection. Likewise, each relationship in the church must fitly join

together to build a healthy church. Healthy relationships are essential for a healthy church. The tool needed to build an Ephesians 4:7–16 model church is already in the church. It is the tool of healthy relationships.

The Maintenance Stage

The final stage of the Building Bridges workshop is the maintenance stage. While every element of building bridges of healthy relationships is vital, the maintenance stage is one of the most important phases because it is a continual process of self-inspection. The ongoing process of maintaining relationships begins with an intentional communal process of growing and conforming to the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Bridges and relationships must undergo continual inspections and preventive maintenance measures to ensure the integrity of the bridge or relationship.

The maintenance stage for building bridges of healthy relationships involves spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is the foundation of human development. The last tool presented in the workshop is holiness. A call to holiness begins with the spiritual aspect of human development through spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship that affects all aspects of human development. Relationships are essential for spiritual formation. Four of the six aspects of human development deal with the substructure (vertical base) and connecting with God, while the other two (physical and social) connect to others. Spiritual formation is a whole life experience.

The Building Bridges workshop presents two preventive maintenance programs that must be carried out intentionally and deliberately to maintain healthy relationships. First, the intentional spiritual disciplines help individuals heed the call to holiness. The inward domain will directly affect the outward domain of spiritual disciplines. The corporate domain (church,

community, and worship) contributes to a person's growth and accountability through participation and practice. Another alternative to corporate domains is spiritual journaling. Spiritual journaling is a tool that can be used as a daily inspiration or a way to monitor one's spiritual growth through self-inspection and accountability. Every participant in the workshop practiced journaling for nine weeks.

Ongoing discipleship is a key to healthy relationships and a healthy church. Discipleship brings a culture of accountability and enhances the communal aspect of relationships. The second preventive maintenance measure is spiritual recordkeeping. This journal can be kept at the back of one's spiritual diary to log conversions, prayers for the unsaved, mission work, etc. Ongoing discipleship is a great indicator of the healthiness of a church. While the time allotted for the workshop did not allow for an extensive study on spiritual disciplines or discipleship, the point of emphasis was one cannot have healthy relationships or a healthy church without spiritual disciplines or discipleship.

Data Analysis

The participant data sheet, inspection reports, and focus groups provided a triangulation of data used to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop. The participant data sheet includes the demographics of the participants in the workshop. The reflection session provided a method of coherency and comprehension from session to session and provided an opportunity for immediate feedback. The feedback from these sessions was combined with the focus groups for the purpose of data analysis. This reflection session was voluntary and designed to allow the participants time for verbal participation in the workshop. This data from the initial Building Bridges workshop provides significant information on how to make future workshops more efficient and how to incorporate more church members into building healthy relationships.

The Participation Data Sheet

One of the most important aspects of data collection is determining if the intended results and audience were effectively obtained. The demographics of the workshop and church reveal the percentage of the church that utilized the workshop. The participation rate directly affects the need and target areas for future workshops. The participation data sheet was developed from the registration form but was not evaluated until the final week of the workshop. Figure 4 reveals that the workshop had slightly better attendance than Sunday school and Wednesday night Bible study. Nearly forty percent of active members attend, indicating that the workshop and building healthy relationships can directly relate to a healthy church. If workshop participants continue connecting the disconnected to God and others through intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship, then other church members may be interested in attending a workshop.

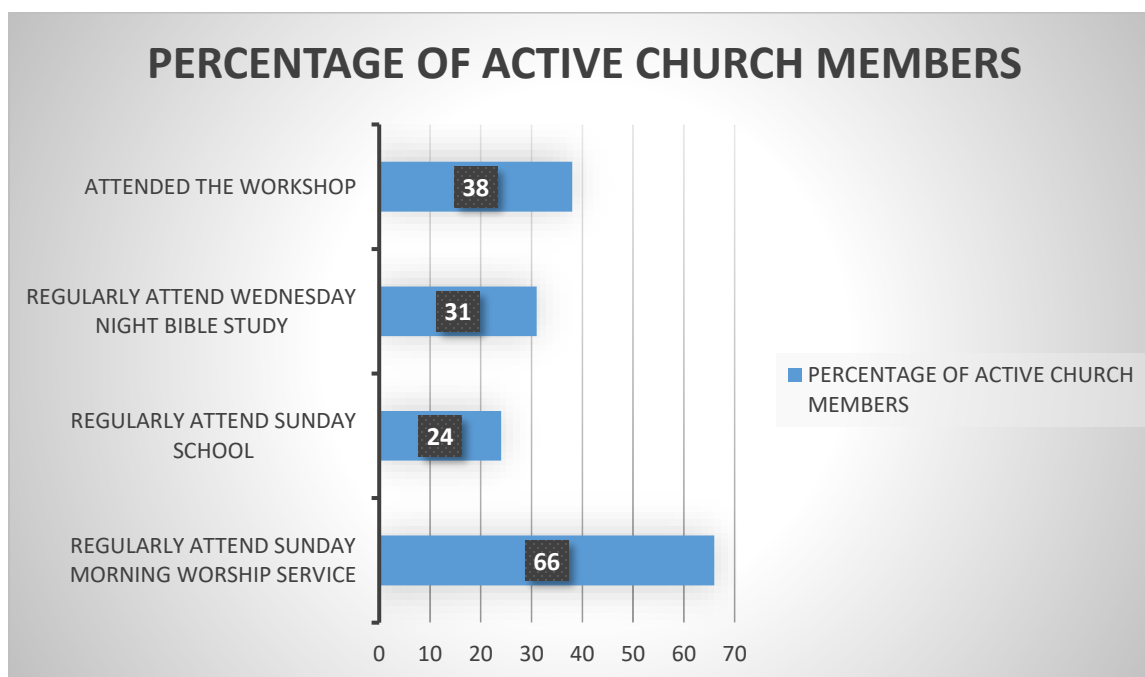


Figure 4. Percentage of active church members

However, nearly sixty percent of the church did not participate in the workshop. This means there is room for better advertising and more fine-tuning of the initial workshop to

encourage more participation in future workshops. The use of small groups may entice more participation in the workshop. These future workshops may be able to target members within a certain age range or couples, depending on the demographics of the church.

Figure 5 depicts the age range selected by participants at registration. Age is not the most significant data point from the Building Bridges workshop, but it does have value in the context of future workshops. Fifteen of the original twenty-three church members that signed up for the workshop were sixty or older. This means that sixty-five percent of attendees at the workshop were sixty or older, which reflects the age demographic of the church. The most alarming statistic is that less than five percent of the participants in the workshop were under the age of thirty-nine.

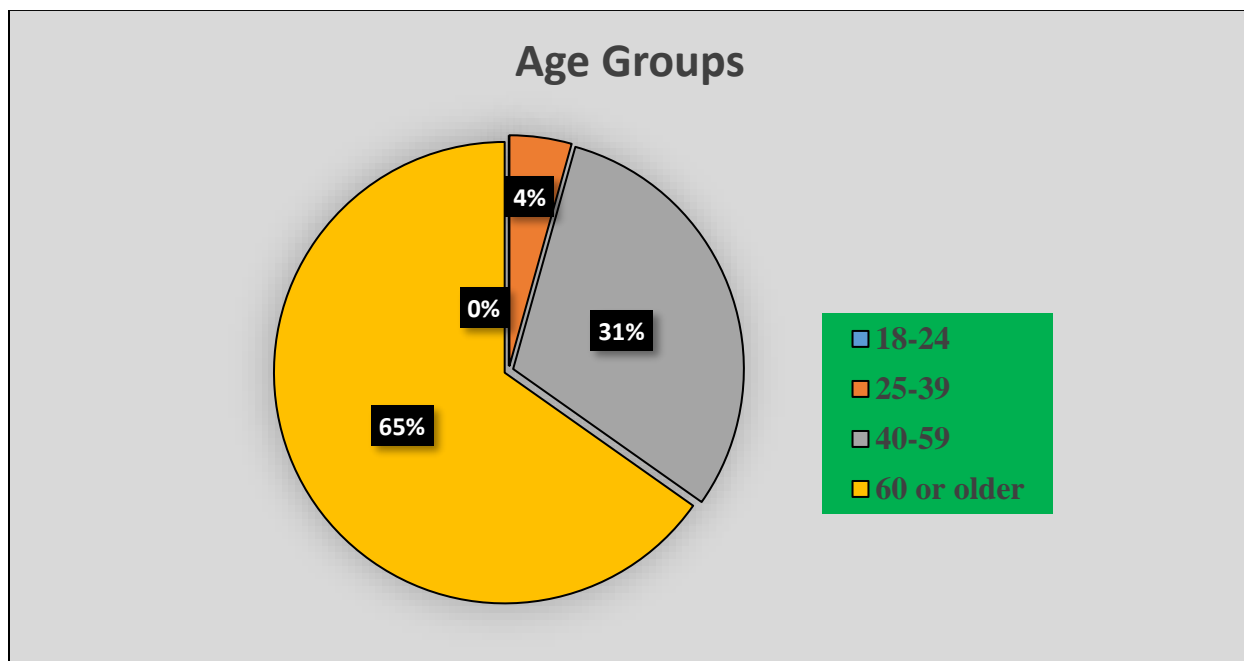


Table 5. The age demographics

Figure 6 supplies additional information about the workshop and church. These demographics help with the targeted demographics of future workshops and the possibility of smaller group sessions to help church members, whether married or single, maintain healthy relationships. Accountability partners and understanding the different relational statuses of

individuals are beneficial tools for building healthy relationships. The marital and gender demographics were compiled from the data collected from the workshop sign-up sheet.

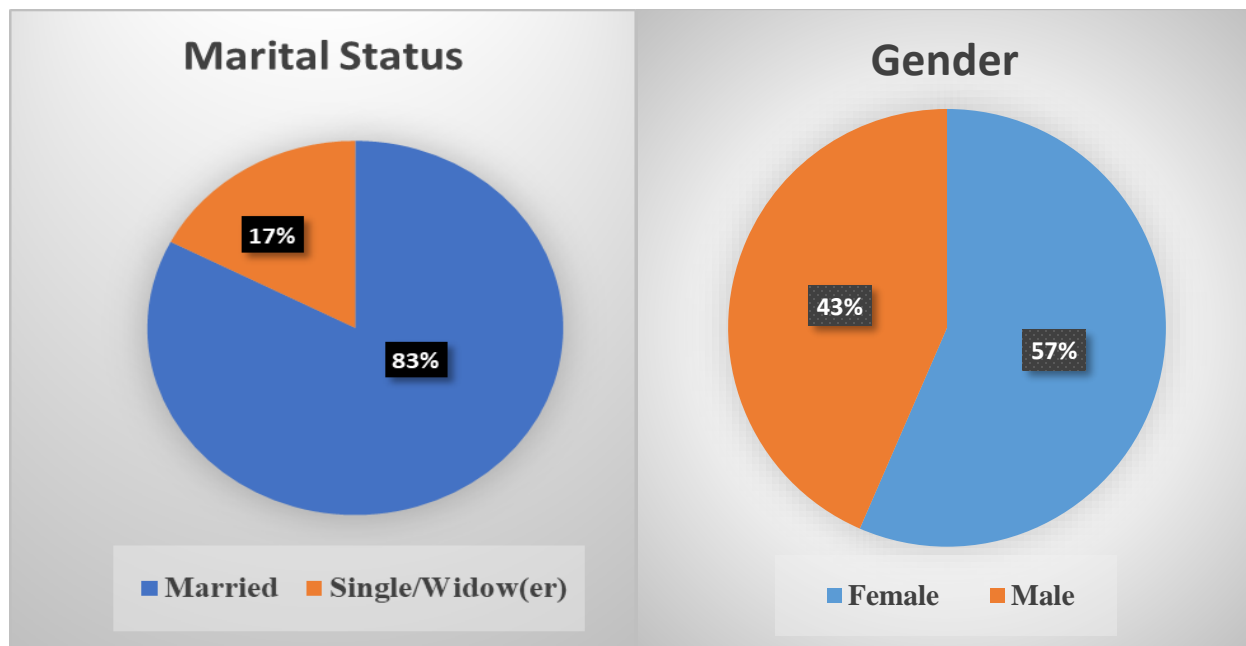


Figure 6. The marital and gender demographics

One of the implications of this data is the need to implement a future workshop that will entice young adults to participate. While targeting teenagers or young adults under the age of twenty-five) is a possible approach for a workshop; only about two percent of the active church members fit this age range. It would also be hard to get an eight- to ten-week commitment from this age group. The level of participation may increase if the number of participants for a workshop is smaller for each group or if the age groups are closer together. Another possibility for future workshops is offering the workshop as part of a Sunday school class that could include a more in-depth study of spiritual disciplines and discipleship. This class would still be voluntary but would not be limited to eight to ten weeks. This would also help participants practice the habit of coming to Sunday school, which is another relationship-building opportunity.

The Inspection Reports

Two major inspections are required during the process of building, completing, and maintaining a bridge project. The initial inspection is graded on a set scale to gauge the current status of the bridge structure and the areas that need repair, if applicable. The old bridge is the focus of this inspection. The final inspection is not a repeat of the first inspection but has some areas of overlap with it. The final inspection is an examination of the new or reconstructed bridge. The results of the final inspection are contingent upon the completion of the bridge project. The final inspection reviews the blueprints that were followed throughout the building process to ensure no shortcuts were taken or steps missed. The initial inspection is a one-time inspection, and the final inspection is part of an ongoing process of assessing the quality and durability of the structure. The Building Bridges workshop included two questionnaires as initial and final inspections for building healthy relationships.

The initial inspection was primarily focused on one's current relationship status. This inspection was scored on a scale of zero to nine, with zero being a failed grade and nine being excellent. The results of the initial inspection report reveal the average score of the nineteen participants who completed the workshop in five specific relationship categories. This inspection was completed in week one, but participants were asked to hold on to their questionnaires until the final inspection was completed in week eight to ensure participants' anonymity. The participants stapled their two reports together to provide data on each participant's relationships with God, others, and self before and after the building stages of the workshop. The inspection questionnaires will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to ensure anonymity.

The initial inspection report (Figure 7) revealed opportunities for growth by allowing participants to assess their current relationships with God, Christians, non-Christians, family, and

self. The participants' average score of 6.4 on the item assessing relationship with self indicates that participants relationship with self was the weakest of the five relationships. The average score for relationship with the family was the highest at 7.1. The participants rated their relationships from one to nine, but the median range was 6.7 for all five categories. This inspection is not a negative reflection on the participants' relationships or FBC-GA, but a tool for self-reflection that can reveal areas where repair is needed in one's life.

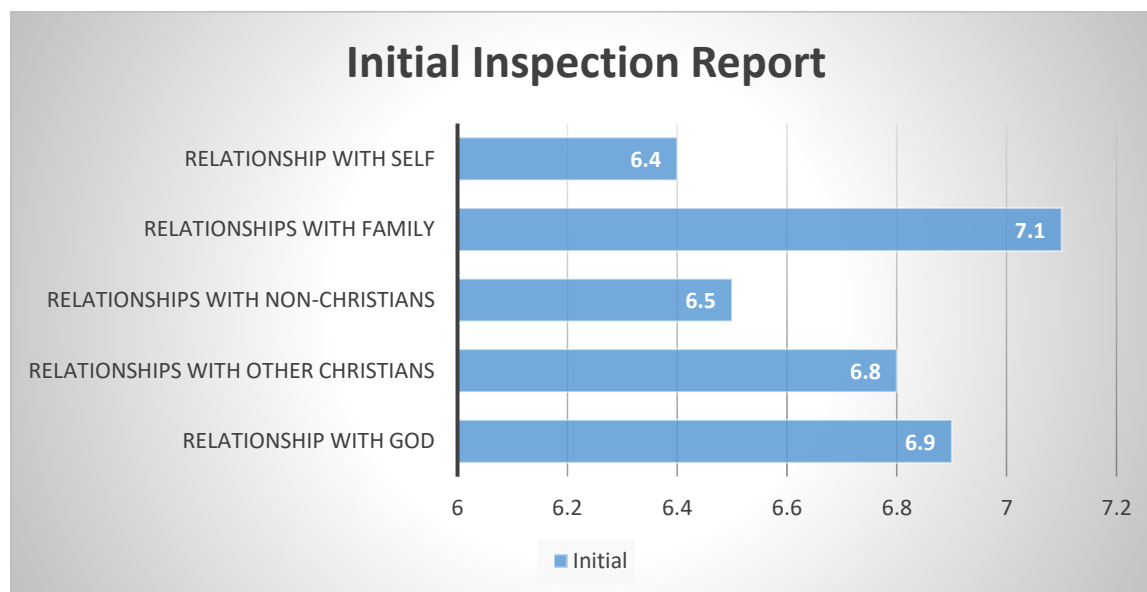


Figure 7. Initial inspection results

The final inspection was intended to be the first phase of an ongoing inspection of participants' relationships with God and others. The results are based on the assumption that each participant provided honest self-reflection and feedback on the content of the workshop and the impact of one's relationship with God and others. This inspection comes after the building stage has been completed and assesses the accessibility, accountability, and reliability of the finished product, whether it is a bridge or a relationship. The final inspection results (Figure 8) revealed that the score for relationship with self, 7.0, was the lowest of the five scores. The participants rated their relationship with God the most highly; the average score for

relationships with God was 7.7. The scores leave room for growth and provide a baseline for maintenance for those participants who scored highly on the final inspection.

The scores for building relationships through ongoing discipleship and intentional spiritual disciplines on the final inspection were relatively high, considering the topic was not covered until week nine in the maintenance stage. While this timing was not intentional, the results provided a look at these relationships directly after the participants finished the building stage of the workshop. The final inspection is intended to be the first stage of an ongoing inspection that builds directly off of the score received in this exercise in week eight. Each participant needs some type of scale to determine where they are and where they would like to be, an effort that begins with a maintenance plan in week nine. This final inspection is related to the Building Bridges workshop and was collected to provide data for the research, so each participant was encouraged to make their own scale for ongoing self-inspections.

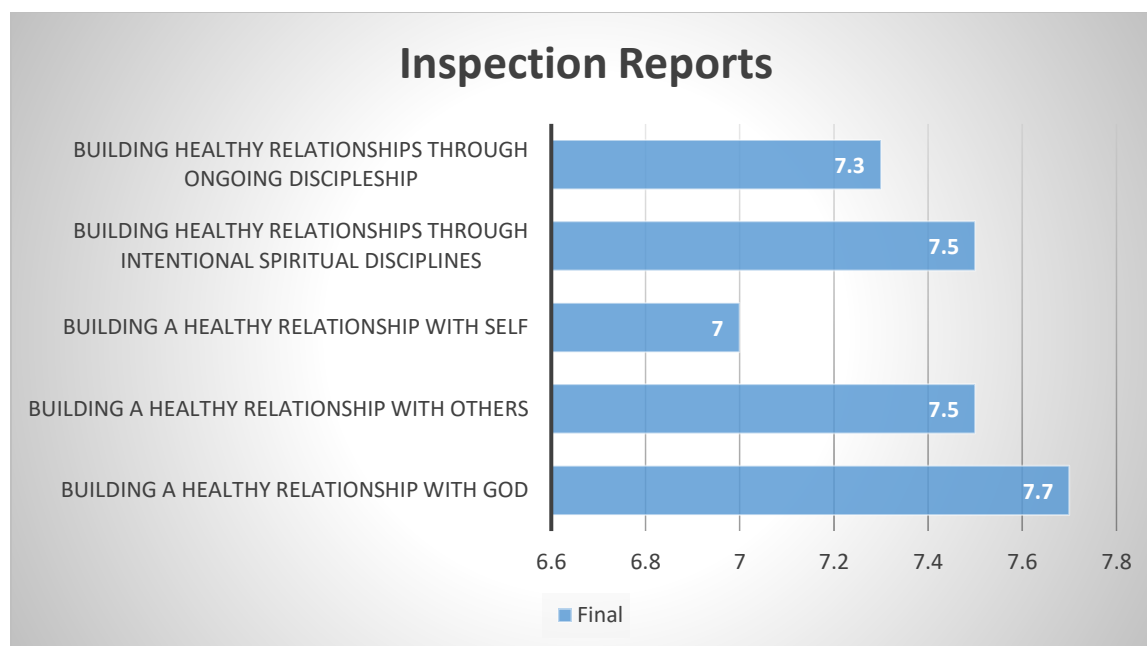


Figure 8. Final inspection results

The comparison of the inspection reports (Figure 9) presents a valuable assessment of the health of one's relationships before and after the workshop. A comparison of data reveals a slight increase from the initial scale to the final scale on relationships with God, others, and self. Revealing an increase in scores on the final inspection was not the primary purpose of the questionnaire. The point of this exercise was self-reflection and honesty. A comparison of inspection reports is only valid if the assessment is accurate.

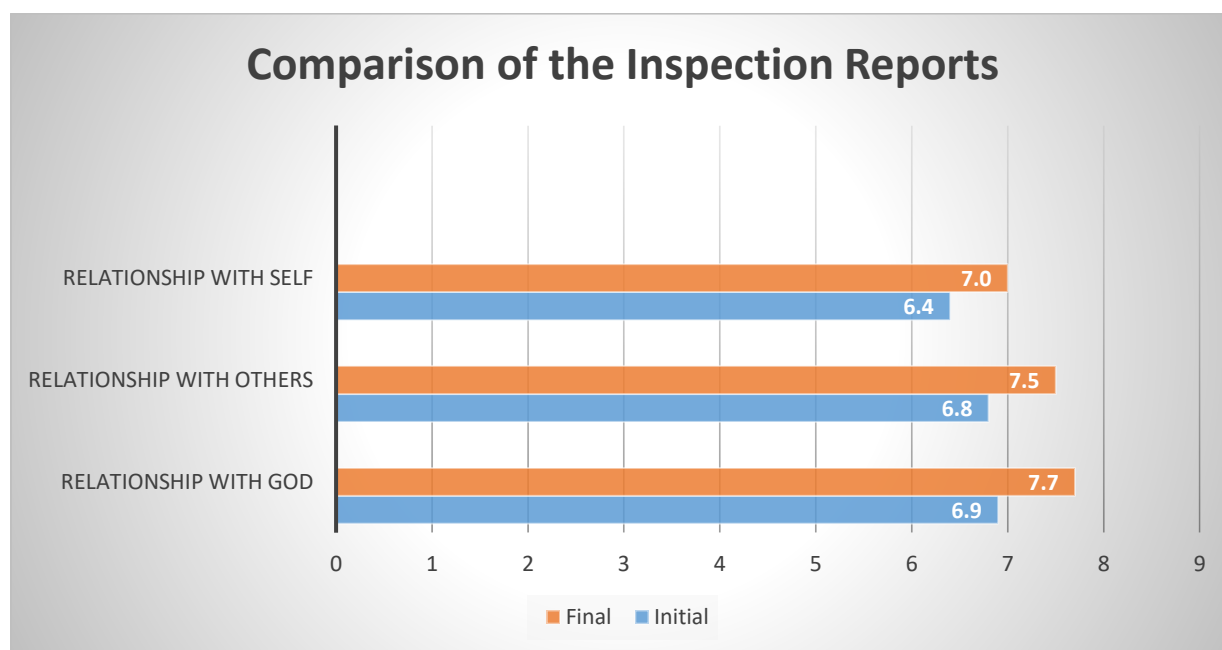


Figure 9. Comparison of the inspection reports

A closer look at the numbers (see Figure 10) tells a slightly different story than the numbers presented in Figure 9. While both charts accurately present the responses of nineteen participants in three specific categories, Figure 9 depicts the average scores on both inspections to illustrate the difference between them. However, a closer look at the numbers reveals that forty-nine percent of the participants saw an increase of at least one point from the initial inspection to the final inspection, twelve percent moved up two or more points, and twenty-five percent stayed the same. The most significant finding not revealed by the average scores is the percentage of participants whose scores decreased on the scale from the initial and final

inspection. Figure 10 reveals that the score of eleven percent of the participants decreased at least one point on the inspection scale, and the scores of three percent decreased two or more points on the scale. A decrease in the number does not reflect deteriorating relationships. One of the things monitored during this workshop was whether some participants would realize that their relationship score from week one had changed after seven weeks of bridge building. The participants were asked not to look at their initial inspection before completing their final inspection. The chart in Figure 10 compares the fifty-seven possible responses on the final inspection questionnaire to the responses to the first three questions of the initial inspection. The last two questions addressed spiritual formation and were not included in this data analysis. One of the main reasons for having the participants hold the initial inspection until the final inspection was complete was to allow for a direct comparison of data for each participant's relationships with God, others, and self. This was a valuable measuring tool for practicing self-inspections.

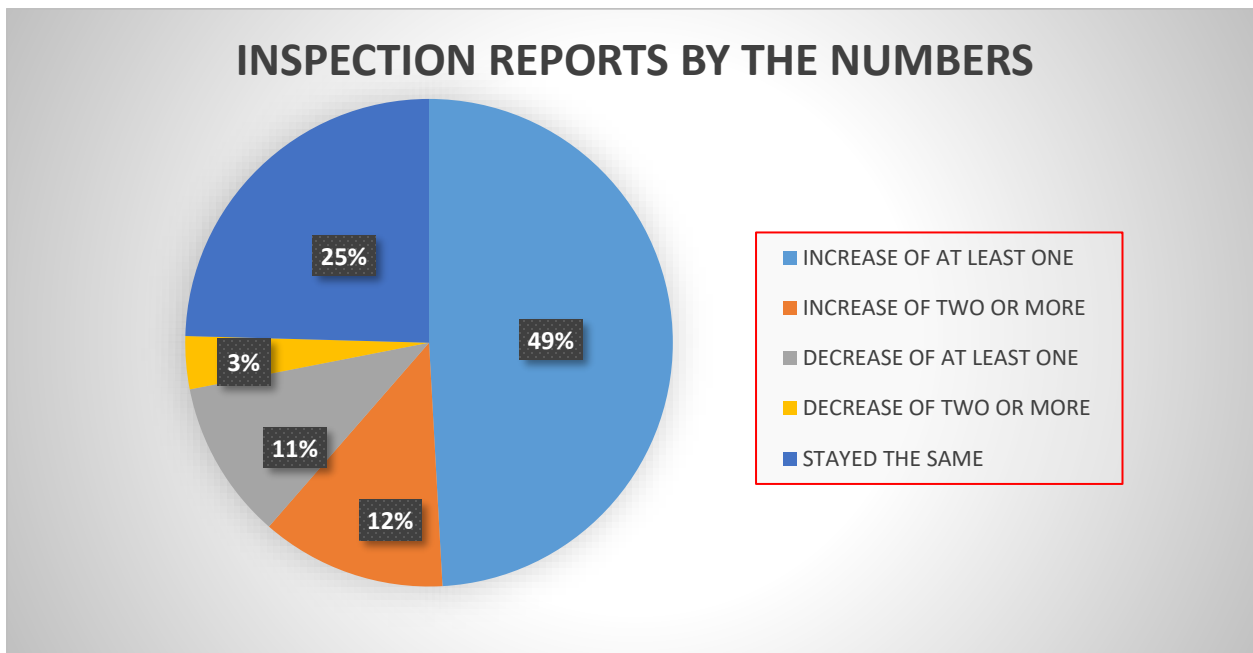


Figure 10. A closer look at the numbers

The Focus Groups

One hour was allotted for each of the two focus groups, which took place immediately after the last session. During the focus groups, participants were invited to openly discuss five specific areas of the workshop, and then an open forum was provided to end the focus session (see Appendix K). The Saturday morning group had eight participants, and the Tuesday night group had eleven participants. Neither focus group session lasted the entire hour, but each participant was given ample opportunity to participate in the focus group sessions. These two groups provided some excellent suggestions, positive feedback, and constructive criticism on the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Building Bridges workshop. First, the time-related factors were discussed, including the number of sessions and the length of each session. The majority of participants agreed that eight to ten weeks is a reasonable length for future workshops. All participants felt the one hour had been a sufficient amount of time for each session.

Second, the effectiveness of the workbook was considered. The questions, self-reflection, and homework assignments (see Appendix I) were the topics of this discussion. One suggestion was to add a Scripture verse or biblical reference in place of the notes section as a point of reflection for each session. Several participants felt the workbook was an excellent source to review after each session. Combining the workbook with the PowerPoint presentation and making the workbook bigger were two items discussed as alternative possibilities. The workbook was perceived as helpful by many of the participants.

The third topic of the focus groups was the effectiveness of the ten-minute reflection period, which was held at the end of every session. While not everyone contributed to this conversation, many of the participants seemed to enjoy the ten-minute reflection time and felt it

helped them understand the overall concept of building healthy relationships. The interaction among participants during the reflection sessions was encouraging and helpful to the instructor in understanding the participant's reception of the material covered in a session. A few reflection sessions exceeded the designated time, but participants were not required to stay after the hour-long session was over. These extended reflection sessions provided some of the best conversations and relationship-building preparation for the next session. While most participants agreed with the allotted ten minutes for reflection, there were a few who felt fifteen minutes would be more helpful.

In the fourth segment of the focus groups, the participants provided feedback on the inspection questionnaires. Some felt it was hard to do self-inspection. According to the focus group, honesty was one of the most important aspects of self-inspection. A comment was made that self-inspections can reveal areas where improvement or repair is needed. Some of the focus group participants were concerned about the accuracy of the inspections. However, the point was made that self-inspections are only beneficial to the one doing the inspection. Inflated numbers do not make healthy relationships. There were several participants who felt the inspection report was a great resource for gauging spiritual and relational progress. The inspections also encouraged some to begin spiritual journaling.

The fifth segment of the focus groups allowed the participants to comment on the effectiveness of the PowerPoint presentation and visual aids. All participants agreed that the PowerPoint presentation made the workshop easier to follow and provided a reference to refer to after the workshop. Most of the focus group agreed that the printed slides for each session were helpful for note-taking and as a reference point for filling out the workbooks. Also, images of bridges under construction were provided as visual aids throughout the building stages of the

workshop. The workbook's title page and several slides of the PowerPoint presentation contained additional visual aids. All the comments on the visual aids were positive. Since the PowerPoint presentation was a printed form of the original outline, many felt it was easy to follow and very beneficial.

The open discussion segment ended the focus sessions for both groups. One open discussion centered on the variety of methods used (i.e., workbook, PowerPoint presentation, visual aids). People learn in many different ways, so incorporating multiple means of presenting the workshop was beneficial for the participants. Another topic brought up in the open discussion segment was the disconnection between salvation and the joy of one's salvation. This is a vertical relationship issue that can be clouded by personal or horizontal relationships. During this conversation, the topics of adding more scriptural emphasis and connecting each session with more Scripture were re-introduced for discussion. While each session has at least one slide devoted to a biblical concept (e.g., love, trust, hope, etc.) or particular Bible verse, a change was made to incorporate at least one Scripture verse at the bottom of each slide to help connect the Bible to building bridges of healthy relationships. This topic also was mentioned during one of the later reflection sessions. Since this topic surfaced again during the open forum time, this strategy will be further implemented in future workshops.

Summary of Results

Connecting the disconnected to God and others begins with healthy spiritual and personal relationships. Building bridges of healthy relationships is fundamental to a healthy church. The triangulation of data collected to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the workshop provides a look back and a look forward into the health of each participant without revealing any confidential information. This section focuses on the results of the workshop, participation

efforts, and building bridges of healthy relationships within the church (i.e., outward expression of one's inward emotions of love, trust, and hope).

The Results of the Workshop

The workshop is meant to serve as a catalyst for healthy relationships and a healthy church. The solution to healthy relationships depends on how the workshop is applied in the lives of the individual participants. Every aspect of a healthy relationship cannot possibly be covered over the course of nine weeks. Additionally, the vast amount of information given during this workshop takes time to digest and implement, and each participant's progress will be different and possibly difficult at times. Visual aids, workbooks, and a PowerPoint presentation provided the tools for participants to build bridges of healthy relationships beyond the conclusion of the workshop. The reflection sessions and focus groups provided valuable feedback on how to make future Building Bridges workshops more effective and more applicable to participants. The ministry at FBC-GA was the target of this workshop, the purpose of which was to connect the disconnected to God and others. Connecting allows a healthy church to grow through intentional spiritual disciplines, which facilitate the inward or vertical application of building a bridge of a healthy relationship with God, and ongoing discipleship, which facilitates the outward or horizontal aspect of building bridges of relationships.

Three sessions of the workshop focused on building a spiritual or vertical support system. The spiritual support system is likened to the substructure of a bridge. The construction of the substructure is the most important part of the building stage. Few bridges are built without a substructure, and even fewer do not have a foundation to support the bridge. If the participants in the workshop are going to build healthy relationships, they must start with a vertical relationship with God. The workshop provided the tools for building healthy relationships, which have been

made available to those willing to engage in the process of conducting an initial inspection, planning, building vertically and horizontally, conducting a final inspection, and performing ongoing intentional maintenance.

The Results of the Participation Effort

The information and time invested in the workshop provide a blueprint for healthy relationships for each participant who truly desires to have healthier relationships with God and with others. Participation in all aspects of the workshop was voluntary but crucial to the participants' ability to understand and apply each step of the building bridges metaphor. One cannot build a bridge alone because it takes a team of planners, builders, and inspectors to work together to complete a project. Participation helps a person feel a part of the process of building bridges of healthy relationships. Workbooks and reflection sessions provided opportunities to participate in the workshop and enticed continual participation after the completion of the workshop.

The topic of session eight was the Ephesians 4:7–16 model church. This passage of Scripture portrays the importance of participation by every church member. The result of the workshop was to encourage each participant of the workshop to be willing participants in building a healthy church that starts with healthy relationships. Each member has a gift, and each gift fitly joins together to equip and edify the body of Christ in love. The model for a healthy church (Eph 4:16) and the model for connecting the disconnected to God and others (Eph 4:31–32) involve the participation or action-driven results from the body of believers, which is the local church. Healthy spiritual relationships require participation, and the result of healthy participation is a healthy church.

The Results of Building Healthy Relationships

Bridges take a long time to build, but the evidence of progress is visibly apparent as soon as the foundation is laid. Nine weeks seems like a long time to commit to a workshop on relationships, but those who invested time and attention to his or her relationships during the workshop are experiencing healthier relationships with God and others. will help establish a healthy relationship with God and others. The complete change in relationships may take a few months to truly evaluate, but progress was evident in many of the participants in the workshop. Healthy relationships will directly affect the health of the church. The intention of the workshop was to equip church members with the tools to build healthy relationships. These tools of completing self-inspection, building a spiritual support system (e.g., through love, trust, and hope), connecting horizontally to others (e.g., through forgiveness and reconciliation), and developing a maintenance program through spiritual journaling, intentional spiritual disciplines, and ongoing discipleship are essential to relationship building after the completion of the workshop. The degree to which healthy relationships are developed will depend on each participant's willingness to use the tools that have been provided through the Building Bridges workshop. The most important step for building bridges or relationships is laying a solid foundation. In relationships, this begins with a vertical relationship with God through the love of Jesus Christ. As a result, all nineteen participants had already laid a foundation in Christ (salvation) before the workshop began. Spiritually healthy relationships form the backbone for a spiritually healthy church, an Ephesians 4:7–16 model church.

Building healthy relationships does not always remove the pain, loss, broken trust, hurt, or the need for counseling, but one of the results of the workshops was to help change the negative thinking patterns created by one's past relationships. One of the most important results

of building a healthy relationship is an inward transformation that draws the individual's focus to the biblical concepts of love, trust, and hope. The foundation of relationships is the love of Christ which reaches well beneath the surface of emotions and disconnect to build a connection to God and others. No bridge can be built without a foundation or a vertical support system. Therefore, the most important result of the building healthy relationships concept is the establishment of a vertical support system that will allow the participants of the workshop to continually connect to God and others. All participants of the workshop were presented with the tools to engage in building a vertical support system that will lead to healthy horizontal relationships beyond the completion of the workshop. The ultimate result of the workshop was to connect the disconnected to God and others.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The idea for the Building Bridges workshop was conceived while the research was passing by the construction of the North Carolina Route 24/27 and Rocky River bridge near the Cabarrus and Stanly County lines (see Figure 11). This bridge did not yet extend over the water when the concept was conceived, but the picture in Figure 12 provides an excellent depiction of the vertical and horizontal aspects of building bridges. The vertical and horizontal stages of building a bridge also apply to building healthy relationships. The debris from the old bridge had to be removed before construction could begin. New relationships are not built on the debris of old relationships. The foundation and all of the support piers (i.e., vertical support) were constructed before the spans (i.e., horizontal support) could begin to be constructed.



Figure 11. NC 24/27 and Rocky River bridge construction project. Photo courtesy of Wind Walkers Aerial Photography.

Connecting the disconnected to God and others is a continual process of building of bridges. Once a bridge or relationship has been established with God and the vertical support

system of the foundation of love, support piers of trust, and the anchor plates of hope are in place, then individuals can start building new bridges with others (i.e., horizontal relationships). Individuals do not have to establish a new relationship with God after the initial relationship is built, but there needs to be a plan to maintain one's relationship with God while building new relationships with others. The Building Bridges workshop uses nine sessions to produce a blueprint on how to continue to build and maintain healthy relationships with God and others after the workshop has concluded.

The results from the reflection sessions at the end of the nine-week workshop not only provide an evaluation of the workshop and its effectiveness in equipping participants with the skills to build healthy relationships, but it also provides a foundation for building a healthy church and healthy leaders. The material learned from the Building Bridges workshop can be applied by the participants of the workshop and then incorporated into additional workshops for FBC-GA and for other churches in the association and community. The two inspection questionnaires and the focus groups provide additional input on the effectiveness and efficiency of the content used in the workshop.

Completing this initial workshop provides a pattern for future workshops and to continue developing an intentional plan or practice of spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship, which is only covered briefly during the workshop in week nine. The maintenance stage begins after relationships are built and becomes essential to the health of the relationship and the church. This last stage of the building bridges process is intended to be a process that continues beyond the conclusion of the workshop. The prerequisite for this last stage is completion of the vertical and horizontal stages of relationship-building. There are no shortcuts to building bridges or relationships because both take time and effort to build.

The purpose of equipping members at FBC-GA with the tools for healthy relationships with God and others after counseling to give members the ability to address hurt, grief, and loss in counseling without shame, guilt, bitterness, or isolation. The workshop's effectiveness in this area will take time to assess, but one of the key relationships in the church is the counselor/counselee relationship. New, healthy relationships must be built on love, trust, hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation, not the hurt, trauma, or grief from the past. This process of building healthy relationships with God and others will also give individuals at FBC-GA the tools to make needed repairs in their lives through self-inspection, accountability, and fitly joining together with other believers.

Research Implications

The research is based on the concept of building bridges and provides a platform for connecting the disconnected to God and others. This platform was used to develop research directly related to building a vertical relationship with God before building horizontal relationships with others. The construction of almost every bridge starts with a vertical support system that is fully completed before the horizontal (i.e., superstructure and deck) work commences. The majority of the research has focused on the building stages of bridges and relationships. Five of nine sessions of the Building Bridges workshop are devoted to building vertical and horizontal relationships with God and others. The literature review provided the topics of focus and direction on how to engage the members at FBC-GA in the process of bridging the interpersonal gap and crossing from relational disconnection to connection.

Session Reflecting

The research covered in the literature review provided the background and basis for building bridges. The sessions reflect the compiled research reviewed during the preparation for the workshop. Each session of the workshop ended with a ten-minute reflection section. Several of these sessions exceeded the ten-minute allotted time because of the interaction between church members and the instructor. These sessions and extra time were voluntary but gave evidence of the participants' attentiveness during each session. The questions and points of emphasis during the reflection session provided some excellent feedback that led to the need for further research. The reflection session also gave each participant an opportunity to fill out his or her workbook. The purpose of the reflection session was to provide a ten-minute time after each session for immediate reflection and input from the participants of the workshop. This ten-minute time was allotted for all sessions. The two sessions a week contained the same content, but the second class had a tendency to receive a refined version of the session.

The information obtained through the literature review was used in the creation of the outline for each session. The first session was a look at the main causes and results of disconnection. This was the only session that was primarily dedicated to disconnection. Each cause of disconnection was briefly discussed, and then the results of disconnection if prolonged were explained. The first session described the debris that may be caused by past traumatic experiences or hurt that impacts one's deep emotional state. Each participant completed his or her initial inspection in the first session to demonstrate the importance of self-inspection; bridges also undergo initial inspections to determine the structural integrity. This workshop is not counseling or a time to regress to the past, but an opportunity to positively move forward spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Building relationships one bridge at a time takes time

and does not erase all the hurt, broken trust, and rumination of the past but provides a new perspective that focuses on building up one's inward emotions through healthy relationships.

The theological and theoretical foundations established in the literature review provided in-depth insight into each topic. The workshop was not intended to be solely a Bible study but was biblically based and supported in every session. Some Scripture reading introduced a session. The second session introduced the workshop's memory verses by reading Ephesians 4:31–32. The fifth session (i.e., the third stage of the building stage) begins with reading Hebrews 6:13–19 to establish the true anchor of hope. The eighth session was the final inspection stage and began with reading Ephesians 4:7–16 as the model for building healthy relationships and healthy churches. This final Scripture is how one gauges his or her healthiness and provides a model to inspect one's spiritual maturity, relationships, and gifts that pertain to the local church.

The theoretical foundation produced models of forgiveness, self-forgiveness, and hope, which were instrumental in the concept of building bridges. The model of hope was based on the hope theory, which revealed the importance of a scale to monitor one's motivations and goals. This was a key thought in establishing inspection questionnaires for the workshop. The inspection questionnaires were modeled after a bridge inspection scale to make it relevant to the building bridges metaphor. Self-inspection using a scale model is vital to maintaining one's progress in spiritual formation and relationship building.

According to the theoretical foundation, negative reciprocity and ruminations often lead to the prolonged disconnection of emotions (i.e., withdrawal, dissociation, isolation) that is often not revealed in counseling sessions. This is a pivotal aspect of the Building Bridges workshop. Building healthy relationships with God and others requires building new relationships that lead

to positive emotional feelings of love, trust, and hope. These feelings can help break one's pattern of negative thinking, giving the individual the opportunity to move forward inwardly, upwardly, and outwardly with God and others.

Connecting the Disconnected

Limited research on the causes and results of disconnection was located to support the necessity of connections and the concept of building bridges and relationships from the disconnected to the connected. The concept of rumination surfaced several times in the research on how positive and negative thoughts work to connect the disconnected. The focus of this research was the deep, emotional aspect of disconnection that impacts spiritual and personal relationships. Therefore, the limited literature on how shame, guilt, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness lead to withdrawal, isolation, secrecy, and dissociation reveals ample opportunity for research on the cognitive effect of disconnection. However, the majority of the research provided the essential reasons FBC-GA members need to build new and healthy relationships.

The emphasis of the research and workshop was future relationships, positive emotions, and one's relationship with God. While the research on disconnection provides the gap for building bridges in session one, the next seven sessions are used to build bridges of relationships that connect the disconnected to God and others. The building process is a step-by-step and time-consuming project, for no bridge is built overnight. This building project must incorporate vertical and horizontal elements. The content of each class in the Building Bridges workshop was strategically aligned with the process of building a bridge, emphasizing the importance of sticking to the blueprint and building each element onto the previous one until the project is completed. Every element of a bridge is vital. Likewise, every element of relationship-building is

vitaly important. Relationship-building incorporates the gifts of the body of believers fitly joined together to equip and edify one another in love (Eph 4:7–16).

The research was conducted under the assumption that most church members who participated in the workshop were Christians. However, the opportunity to set a foundation of love, as discussed in session three, and the biblical support for this foundation gives the instructor of the workshop an opportunity to present the gospel and the love of Christ as the cornerstone of one's faith. The research provided a significant opportunity to implement biblical principles and Scriptures in each session.

Research Applications

The central span and the deck are the final two phases of the building stage, representing the horizontal aspect of building bridges. Construction of the horizontal pieces cannot take place without a vertical support system. Likewise, every individual must have a vertical support system before their horizontal relationships can become healthy. The vertical support system is a foundation of love, support piers of trust, and anchor plates of hope, which are found in one's relationship with Christ and the love and hope of Christ. While other support piers (obedience, faithfulness, worship) are important elements in building a vertical relationship with God, trust was at the forefront of most literature reviews on relationship-building and relationship counseling.

The theological foundation research supplied the biblical basis for the workshop. The love of Christ and Christ being the cornerstone of every relationship was the foundational concept on which the Building Bridges workshop was formulated. The anchor of hope (Heb 6:13–19) was emphasized as crucial in establishing a vertical support system. The primary support system for a bridge is a foundation, support piers, and anchor plates. All three elements

must be established before the spans and deck can be completed. The theological application establishes the three basic elements or support systems for healthy relationships. With a few exceptions, every aspect of the vertical support system (i.e., substructure) is fully completed before builders can proceed horizontally (i.e., superstructure and deck). This can be applied to building bridges or building relationships. The research provides significant evidence that connecting to God must come first, and an established relationship with God allows healthy horizontal relationships with others. No bridge or relationship can survive if they are only built horizontally.

Ephesians 4:7–16 provides a picture of a healthy church that starts with healthy relationships. This application of the metaphor of building bridges was evident during the final inspection in session eight. The final bridge inspection ensured that the work was complete, the blueprints were followed, and no shortcuts were taken in the process of building. Ephesians 4:7–16 is the blueprint for healthy relationships and healthy churches. This biblical passage provides support for continually gauging the health of one's relationships, as building is not a one-time process. Also, this text teaches that relationships are not a solo act and that God did not intend for one's spiritual gifts to benefit only the individual. Gifts that are fitly joined together through one relationship at a time are the key to forming healthy relationships and a healthy church.

The central Bible verses for the workshop were Ephesians 4:31–32, which describes a disconnected state (v. 31) and a connected state (v. 32). The bridge (i.e., one's relationship with God and others) is the connector between these two verses. The original image used in the PowerPoint presentation in session two emphasized the gap between the two verses and was later changed from a completed bridge to an unfinished bridge. The change was made to emphasize building is an ongoing process, and when one bridge is completed, or one relationship is

established, then another can begin. The intentional and ongoing effort to build bridges of healthy relationships is the key to building a healthy church at FBC-GA. Thus, the title Building Bridges is used and reiterated at the beginning of every session to remind each participant that this concept of building healthy relationships is not a one-time event.

While the Building Bridges workshop was not intended to serve as a nine-week Bible study, each session had a biblical application that coincided with the vertical and horizontal aspects of relationships and how to build and maintain them. The application of building bridges is only effective if participants are willing to remember the blueprints of healthy relationships, practice the model of healthy relationships, and maintain healthy relationships. The instructor's purpose for the workshop was to equip participants with the tools to build and maintain healthy relationships at FBC-GA. Healthy spiritual relationships are necessary to build a spiritually healthy church.

Research Limitations

The plethora of information and topics on building relationships cannot be properly researched in the allotted time for a nine-week workshop or expounded on in forty to fifty-minute sessions. The Building Bridges workshop research was limited to the most recent and most relevant topics. The five types of disconnection and four results of disconnection were revealed through research. The literature review dictated which terms were most commonly used in regard to relationship-building. The application of the metaphor of building bridges was limited to the main five stages of building a bridge. Five weeks of the workshop were spent on the third stage, the building stage. Originally, the workshop was planned to last only eight weeks, but the workshop was extended to nine weeks to incorporate all five elements of bridge-building

and to introduce a maintenance plan in the final session. The four main restrictions during the research process were the information, age range, session, and theological limitations.

The Information Limitations

The most significant limitation of this was information. The Building Bridges workshop was designed based on the most current literature on disconnection and connection in relationships. The discussion of causes and results of disconnection was limited to one session because the purpose of the workshop was to connect church members to God and others by equipping and engaging participants to implement a plan to build and maintain healthy relationships. Therefore, the focus of the research was connecting with others to build healthy relationships, which limited the time spent on researching the aspects of disconnection (i.e., disconnection associated with previous trauma, hurt, or loss). Understanding disconnection is important to evaluate oneself through a self-inspection, but research on disconnection is limited ethically as to what can be discussed beyond data from a workshop or focus group.

The literature reviewed on building bridges of healthy relationships was limited to the most relevant resources compiled over the past year. After the researcher assembled a list of authors and research topics that pertained to building relationships, he narrowed down the topics to love, trust, hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The vast amount of information on these five topics limited the amount of research conducted on each topic and prevented the researcher from investigating additional topics (faithfulness, obedience, resilience, etc.). Spiritual and personal relationship information was limited to the research found during the theological and theoretical foundation portion of the research.

Information on intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship was limited to an introductory level due to the extensive amount of information and the time allotted for session nine, the maintenance stage. Some topics were added (i.e., ruminations) when the outline was placed on a PowerPoint presentation, but the discussion was limited to a basic level of information based on newly found research or pertinent information from previous research. The limitation due to the vast amount of information on relationship-building provides a significant opportunity for further research.

The Age Range Limitations

The anticipated age range and the actual age range of the participants in the workshop aligned with the age demographic of FBC-GA. The research was limited to adult relationships. The danger of limiting the research to a particular age range is that information can be missed that may affect relationships of people of all ages. The small amount of research on children and teenagers that was included was used to build a case for the seriousness of disconnection in the first session. Childhood or teenage trauma that carries effects into adulthood creates a disconnection that results in isolation, secrecy, and dissociation. Trauma was not the focus of the workshop, but it is important to establish that emotional disconnection can be triggered by trauma that occurs at any age and lasts for moments or decades. Counseling resources related to models of forgiveness, self-forgiveness, and hope were limited to adult-age results and information for the purpose of this study.

While sixty-five percent of the participants in the Building Bridges workshop were sixty or older, the amount of research on specific gerontology topics was limited. The workshop was topic-driven and not age-driven to ensure all who signed up for the workshop could benefit. The workshop was limited to participants aged eighteen or older, so much of the research reviewed

was also limited in this manner. The most pertinent and current research was not age-specific, which made it hard to distinguish relationship research for the aging. Building relationships is applicable to all ages, but building healthy relationships at FBC-GA is currently limited to the age demographics of the church.

The Sessions Limitation

The allotted fifty minutes per session limited the topics that could be presented. Obedience, faithfulness, and worship are examples of topics that can be researched and added to the support piers of trust in future workshops. However, the limitation of fifty minutes per session in the building stage, which spanned five sessions, restricted additional topics from being introduced related to the vertical support portion of building bridges. The central span of forgiveness and the maintenance stage were both hard to limit to a fifty-minute session. Forgiveness was discussed in only one class, but the vast amount of literature on forgiveness could provide enough information for a whole workshop. The maintenance stage was a brief introduction to intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship. The research implemented for this stage was confined to the most relevant research, as the enormous amount of literature on each topic could not be used in the allotted time. The intention was to introduce the tools of spiritual journaling, spiritual disciplines, and ongoing discipleship.

The nine sessions had the same limitations. Each session was divided into segments, each of which had a focus and a time limit. For example, the maintenance stage was broken down into two twenty-five-minute segments, which were divided into parts (see Appendix L, slide 59). Each segment was limited according to the allotted time for that segment. As the workshop progressed, the time limitations were still in place, but how that time was used changed due to new information or a better sense of timing by the instructor.

The two questionnaires used in sessions one and eight took up ten minutes of each class time, which reduced the amount of time for the session stage to forty minutes for the initial and final inspections. The first segment of the final inspection in session eight was limited to four ten-minute parts. This limited the amount of information that could be covered on building an Ephesians 4:7–16 model church. This passage provides the blueprint for building healthy relationships and churches, and a full session could have been used to cover the equipping, edifying, loving, and fitly joined together models.

The Theological Limitations

The Building Bridges workshop was not intended to be a Bible study on relationships, but healthy relationships require a theological foundation. The theological limitations are based on time and the use of specific Scripture during the workshop. The memory verse (Eph 4:31-32) was introduced in session two to provide a theological context for the entire nine-week workshop. This memory verse was referenced a few times in other sessions but was only discussed in session two.

Session five, focused on the anchor plates of hope as described in Hebrews 6:11–19 as the anchor of the soul. While some other verses were provided to emphasize an anchor in God's Word, this session was mostly limited to the Hebrews 6. Session eight provided the most concentrated use of Scripture in one session. Each part of segment one was related to Ephesians 4:12–16. The theological limitation is time, as this session was limited to forty minutes. Ten minutes were allotted for each of the four models, which is not sufficient time to cover the equipping each other model (v. 12), the edifying the body of Christ model (v. 12), the loving each other model (v. 15–16), and the fitly joined together model (v. 16).

The overarching theme of the workshop is building a vertical relationship with God. A bridge or healthy relationship cannot exist without a vertical support system. If even one element is missing, the structural integrity of the whole project or relationship will be affected. Thus, a theological foundation is critical in building healthy relationships, but it is limited to a foundation and not an exegetical study.

Further Research

The Building Bridges workshop was limited to nine weeks, so the opportunity for further research is vast. Several topics were introduced and limited to an allotted time during each session in the workshop planning, which provides plenty of room for further research. Forgiveness research, the transition from an outline to a PowerPoint presentation, and the topics covered in the building stage provided several opportunities for further research.

Forgiveness Research

First, interpersonal forgiveness is an area of building healthy relationships that needs further research beyond the Building Bridges workshop. The level of one's understanding of God's forgiveness is related to one's forgiveness toward others. In other words, anger toward God often relates to anger toward others, and a feeling of forgiveness from God correlates with more forgiveness toward others. Likewise, the level of forgiveness or unforgiveness of and from other believers will often determine the level of forgiveness with non-believers. One's anger toward God and its relationship to interpersonal forgiveness need further study.¹

Secondly, literature has begun to discuss the relationship between interpersonal and collective forgiveness in the realm of redemption. Collective forgiveness may be instrumental in

¹ Julie J. Exline, "Anger Toward God and Divine Forgiveness," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, 2nd ed., eds by Everett L. Worthington, Jr., and Nathaniel G. Wade (New York: Routledge, 2019), 122. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351123341>

fostering reconciliation.² Building spiritual and personal relationships depends on forgiveness and reconciliation, just as bridges depend on a superstructure and deck process. Therefore, how forgiveness and reconciliation can be affected by collective forgiveness needs further study.

The Transition from an Outline to a PowerPoint Presentation

The instructor's decision to reformat the outline into a PowerPoint presentation revealed that more information was needed to fill the time allotted for each session. This additional information produced some additional content on the original topics and some additional topics of importance that needed further study. Reconciliation was part of the original study, but more information was needed on the subject. The act of reconciliation is a field that needs further research but cannot be covered in a fifty-minute session. The act of reconciliation is closely related to forgiveness but requires the trust and participation of both parties involved. While reconciliation is the subject of some pastoral counseling studies, it is not emphasized in most literature.

Restoration is another topic that needs more research, particularly the type of restoration one has with God because of Christ.³ In addition, the term *ruminatio*n is pertinent to the concept of building new healthy relationships. Rumination was a late addition to session six and needs further study. Changing the way an individual thinks begins with changing the way one feels. Building bridges of healthy relationships requires developing a vertical support system that produces an inward change of hope, trust, and love that will, in turn, produce positive feelings and thoughts toward God and others. Ruminations and negative reciprocity are negative thought

² Wenzel, "Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Peace," 323.

³ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 418.

patterns that lead to emotional disconnection. Shame is a good example of the feeling of unworthiness, embarrassment, or stupidity that increases when self-worth is being devastated by repetitive negative thinking.⁴ Therefore, further study on understanding the effects of negative reciprocity and ruminations and creating a preventive maintenance program or strategy before one becomes disconnected would be beneficial.

The Building Stages

The building stage of the building bridges concept included three phases that were covered over five weeks of the workshop. A substructure (i.e., a foundation of love, support piers of trust, anchor plates of hope), a superstructure (i.e., central span of forgiveness), and the deck (i.e., deck of reconciliation) were each discussed in fifty-minute sessions. Therefore, these topics could be further researched for an in-depth study of each relational topic. The session on the central span of forgiveness was the only session that went over its allotted fifty-minute time limit in the building stages of the workshop. Building a bridge requires several spans for the superstructure to be complete before the construction of the deck can begin. These spans in relationship building could be expanded to include resilience, intimacy, empathy, or restoration, and each would need further study on its impact on relationship-building.

Lastly, the results of the focus groups and the PowerPoint presentation reveal some other topics that need to be incorporated into the Building Bridges workshop, possibly through the addition of one more session. Specifically, obedience and faithfulness should be researched and added to the support piers of trust to build a stronger case for the significance of a solid support system in the process of building relationships. Additional support piers are also appropriate for the metaphor because more than one support pier is needed for a bridge. While the central span is

⁴ Clark, *The Negative Thoughts Workbook*, 115–117.

the last portion of a bridge to be put in place, there are several spans that make up a bridge.

Therefore, the span of intimacy and the span of resilience are two options for further research.

In addition, one possible change that would induce further research is changing the deck of reconciliation in Session Seven to a span and using the deck of restoration or the deck of resilience as the final building phase. Restoration is a key to healing oneself and reconnecting one's relationships.⁵ The act of restoration brings a sense of hope and safety through resilience and a sense of integrity or dignity in the process of building healthy relationships.⁶ Therefore, the spans of intimacy, resilience, and reconciliation could be taught in an additional session between the central span of forgiveness and the deck of restoration.

Conversely, if future building bridges workshops end with reconciliation or restoration as the final two building sessions, then the participants of the workshop may focus on rebuilding or dealing with past traumas and experiences. The research for future workshops needs to continue focusing on building new relationships that can help church members overcome negative emotions and negative ruminations that hinder current and future relationships. Therefore, the deck of resilience may be the best choice to end the building stage and complete the horizontal aspect of building bridges of healthy relationships.

Conclusion

Current research reveals that everyone experiences some level of disconnection at some point in life. The results of disconnection are unknown to many, as they are hidden deep beneath the emotional surface and are often not revealed in counseling. Shame, guilt, and bitterness devolve into withdrawal, isolation, secrecy, and dissociation. This leads to unhealthy

⁵ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 138.

⁶ Mucci, *Resilience and Survival*, 60.

relationships with God and with others. The Building Bridges workshop presents an opportunity to equip the members of FBC-GA with the tools to build new bridges of healthy relationships that rest on the foundation of the love of Christ. A support system establishes a vertical relationship with God that can withstand the storms of life, bear the weight of one's circumstances, and create a positive outlook through horizontal relationships.

Connecting the disconnected to God and others requires a lifelong process of spiritual formation through relationship building. Intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship are the basis of healthy relationships. Love, trust, and hope are established inwardly as one's relationship with God grows and is expressed outwardly through worship and discipleship. The Ephesians 4:7–16 model church provides the example of how to maintain healthy relationships within the church that will result in a healthy church.

The bridge metaphor reminds the participants of the Building Bridges workshop that building relationships must involve an initial inspection, a planning stage, a building stage, a final inspection, and a maintenance plan. The maintenance plan is not a plan to build a bridge but a plan for how to engage in an ongoing process of connecting the disconnected to God and others by continually building bridges of healthy relationships. Every time a workshop participant crosses over a bridge, it should be a reminder of the importance of establishing healthy vertical and horizontal relationships.

APPENDIX A
PERMISSION REQUEST FORM

September 10, 2023

Deacon Board
First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine

Dear Deacon Board at First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Building Bridges workshop, and the purpose of my research is to connect the disconnected at FBC-GA to God and others after counseling by equipping church members with the skills to build bridges of healthy relationships

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my Building Bridges workshop in the fellowship hall at First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine. Participants will be asked to register, complete two questionnaires, fill out a weekly workbook, and participate in a focus group at the end of the workshop. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,



/Jonathan W. Terry
Senior Pastor

FBC-GA Permission Response

First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine

Permission Response

September 10, 2023

Deacon Board
First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine

Dear Jonathan W. Terry
After a careful review of your research proposal entitled Building Bridges Workshop, we have decided to grant you permission to conduct your workshop in the fellowship hall at First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

We grant permission for Jonathan W. Terry to contact members at First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine to invite them to participate in his Building Bridges workshop.

We are requesting a copy of the results of the Building Bridges workshop upon completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Deacon Chairman

[Redacted Signature]

Vice Chairman

[Redacted Signature]

Deacon

[Redacted Signature]

Deacon

[Redacted Signature]

Deacon

[Redacted Signature]

APPENDIX B

THE KICKOFF LUNCHEON FLYER



CONNECTING THE DISCONNECTED TO GOD AND OTHERS

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GLEN ALPINE

SATURDAY, December 16, 2023 . 2 PM

Luncheon to Introduce

the Building Bridges Workshop

(No cost or participation is required to attend the luncheon)

APPENDIX D

LEGAL CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Building Bridges: Connecting the Disconnected to God and Others After Counseling

Principal Investigator: Jonathan W. Terry, DMIN Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

You are invited to participate in a research study on building bridges to healthy relationships. To participate in this workshop, you must be a member of FBC-GA, thirteen years of age or older, and be willing to commit to a nine-week workshop. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Anyone under the age of eighteen will need to have an additional parental/guardian letter of consent to participate. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

The purpose of the study is to formulate and implement the Building Bridges workshop at FBC-GA that will bridge the interpersonal gaps crossing from disconnection to the connection of healthy relationships.

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

1. Participate in an in-person one-hour session for nine consecutive weeks.
2. Participate in a weekly ten-minute reflection session that will be the last segment of each one-hour session.
3. Participate in weekly workbook assignments. The workbooks will be handed out at registration
4. Participate in a focus group at the end of the workshop

Direct Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include obtaining the skills to build and maintain bridges of healthy relationships beyond a nine-week workshop.

Benefits to society include remaining connected during pastoral counseling sessions so that the inner emotions are expressed through the building of healthy relationships and not suppressed in isolation or dissociation.

Risk: The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. All information used will be voluntary and no personal or prior counseling information will be used in the building bridges process.

Protection of Information: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

- Data will be stored in a designated locked filing cabinet. After five years, all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Interviews will be conducted and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings

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

Voluntary nature of the Workshop: Participation in this workshop is voluntary. Your decision on 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 before submitting the questionnaires without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Contact and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Jonathan W. Terry. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or email him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor.

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

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

Your Consent: Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher 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.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E

THE INITIAL INSPECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Do not put your name on this questionnaire or share it with others. Keep questionnaire number one until the final inspection questionnaire is handed out in week nine. This questionnaire will provide a time of self-reflection and a means of monitoring one's relationship-building before the building stage of the workshop begins. The only way the initial questionnaire can be effective is for all participants to respond according to the results of their own self-reflection and current condition. A condition rating of 4 or less on one of the following items classifies a bridge as structurally deficient. The initial and final inspection questionnaires are a means to measure and evaluate the improvement in building healthy relationships.

Questionnaire #1: The Initial Inspection

1. My relationship with God (circle one)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

2. My relationship with other Christians (circle one)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

3. My relationship with non-Christians (circle one)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

4. My relationship within the home (marriage, children, etc.)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

5. My relationship with myself

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

APPENDIX F

THE FINAL INSPECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire will provide a time of self-reflection and a means of monitoring one's relationship-building after week eight has been completed. The final inspection is intended to be an ongoing self-inspection that monitors one's healthy relationships with God, others, and self. A healthy relationship is a relationship, whether a small group or individual relationship, that brings accountability, credibility, and spiritual maturity to a believer through discipleship and spiritual formation, which will be introduced in session nine of the Building Bridges workshop. The final inspection questionnaire can only be effective if all participants have finished the first four stages of building relationships and have responded according to the results of their own self-reflection. Once the final inspection questionnaire is complete, each participant should compare the initial and final questionnaires before releasing them to the researcher for data comparison. This comparison is a means to measure and evaluate the improvement in building healthy relationships. The data collected from these questionnaires will be anonymous and used in the third reflection session to evaluate the efficacy of the workshop. This final inspection is intended to be a continual self-inspection scale built through healthy relationships.

Questionnaire #2: The Final Inspection

1. I am building a healthy relationship with God (circle one)

9 – Excellent

4 – Poor

8 – Very Good

3 – Serious

7 – Good

2 – Critical/Closed

6 – Satisfactory

1 – Imminent Failure

5 – Fair

0 – Failed

2. I am building healthy relationships with other Christians (circle one)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

3. I am building a healthy relationship with myself (circle one).

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

4. I am building healthy relationships through spiritual disciplines (circle one)

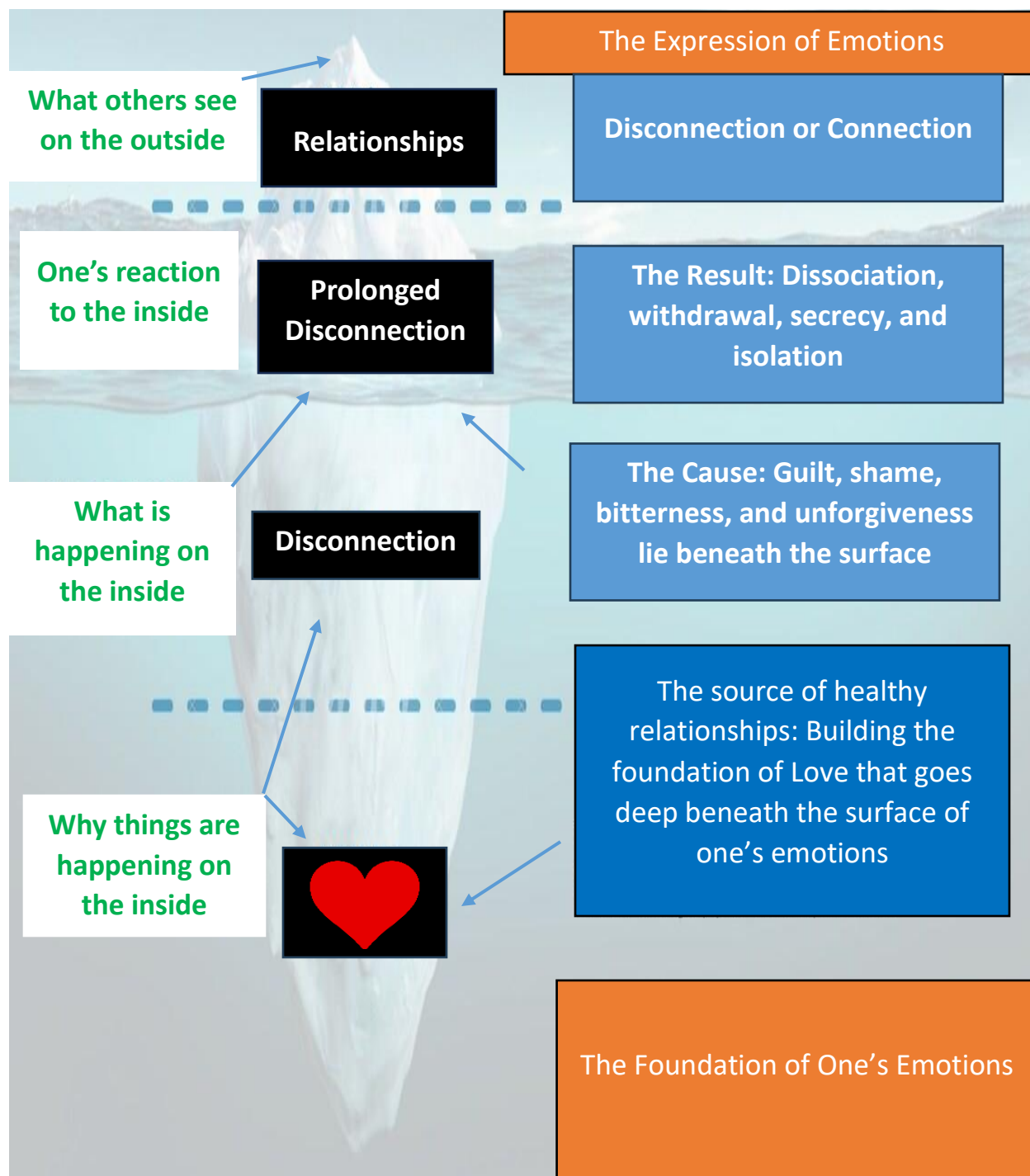
- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

5. I am building healthy relationships through discipleship (circle one)

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 9 – Excellent | 4 – Poor |
| 8 – Very Good | 3 – Serious |
| 7 – Good | 2 – Critical/Closed |
| 6 – Satisfactory | 1 – Imminent Failure |
| 5 – Fair | 0 – Failed |

APPENDIX G

THE FOUNDATION OF ONE'S EMOTIONS



APPENDIX H

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION

In Chapter Eight of *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development*, Mark Maddix defines and discusses human development in spiritual formation and its relationship with Christian formation.¹ This chapter is built on the theological presupposition that humans have the capacity to experience God by the grace of God and only through God.² The three stages of spiritual formation are purgation, illumination, and union; these stages begin with an awakening stage which is one's encounter with God and self.³ Spiritual formation begins to develop the whole life of human development that centers around Christian formation.⁴

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation involves being transformed or formed (Gal 4:19) inwardly, which changes one's nature to be more Christlike in character and behavior. Wilhoit explains, "Spiritual formation is the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵ This process includes both human and divine aspects of spiritual formation that occur through an intentional or deliberate process of being transformed into the image of Christ.⁶

Another important element of Maddix's discussion on spiritual formation is the role of

¹ Mark A. Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development*, eds. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 237–72.

² *Ibid.*, 239.

³ *Ibid.*, 253–255.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Scripture. Scripture's ability to transform its readers into the image of Christ requires a personal, intimate, open, and receptive attitude that can be absent when one reads the Scripture as historical information.⁷ Martin Luther suggests that the reading of Scripture should be internal and not merely historical.⁸ Scripture and spiritual formation require the individual to open up to the text in a way that allows the Bible to infuse the Word of God into one's life.⁹

Spiritual development is a significant dimension of human life that interrelates with one's cognitive, emotional, and social development, and one's spiritual growth often indicates how one is growing in the natural realm.¹⁰ Christian formation was not meant to be the sole aspect of a human being but a part of a whole-body transformation that must continue to be nurtured and developed in order for the individual to grow toward spiritual maturity.¹¹

Spiritual Formation in Building Bridges

Spiritual formation involves the whole person, which includes the inmost being of an individual (i.e., the heart, will, and spirit). The members of First Baptist Church of Glen Alpine (FBC-GA) that are building and maintaining healthy relationships through the Building Bridges process must engage in spiritual formation as a lifelong process that takes place in the context of community.¹² The Building Bridges workshop is a catalyst for building relationships, but building and maintaining healthy relationships beyond the workshop is a journey of faith that involves a process of action, change, and even surprises.¹³

⁷ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 256.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰ Ibid., 264–265.

¹¹ Ibid., 265.

¹² Ibid., 242.

¹³ Ibid., 243.

Healthy relationships that are built on spiritual formation require practice or spiritual discipline. The inward domain of spiritual disciplines (i.e., prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, fasting, and silence) enables the development and transformation of the inwardness of each individual who practices them. The outward domain of spiritual disciplines helps individuals to build bridges from a social and behavioral perspective that allows them to corporately practice healthy relationships with others (e.g., worship, spiritual direction, and celebration).¹⁴

The dimensions of human development and how they relate to spiritual formation are illustrated in the Building Bridges model (Figure 1), which is derived from Ted Ward's illustration of the human hand and the six dimensions of human development.¹⁵ The core element in human development is the spiritual aspect. This aspect is the foundation and most significant part of the inward domain of spiritual formation. The moral aspect of human development provides support to the spiritual aspect as part of the foundation and support piers. The emotional aspect of human development connects to the moral and mental aspects to form a solid support system for the inward domain of spiritual formation. These four elements allow the inward domain of spiritual formation to develop into an outward domain through the physical and social aspects of human development. The bridge deck and the barrier represent the physical and social elements of relationships to express one's spiritual growth outwardly where spiritual disciplines can thrive. Once a bridge is constructed, each aspect of human development becomes one cohesive unit that can be used in the corporate domain.

Once the members at FBC-GA have established a solid foundation of spiritual formation in the building bridges to healthy relationships process, then the other aspects of human

¹⁴ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 260–262.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 262–266.

development will be well supported so the individual may experience the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Rom 12:1).¹⁶ The workshop is intended to be the catalyst for human development and spiritual formation, which will be an ongoing, intentional practice for those that successfully complete the workshop. One of the purposes of building healthy relationships at FBC-GA is to build and maintain a healthy church.

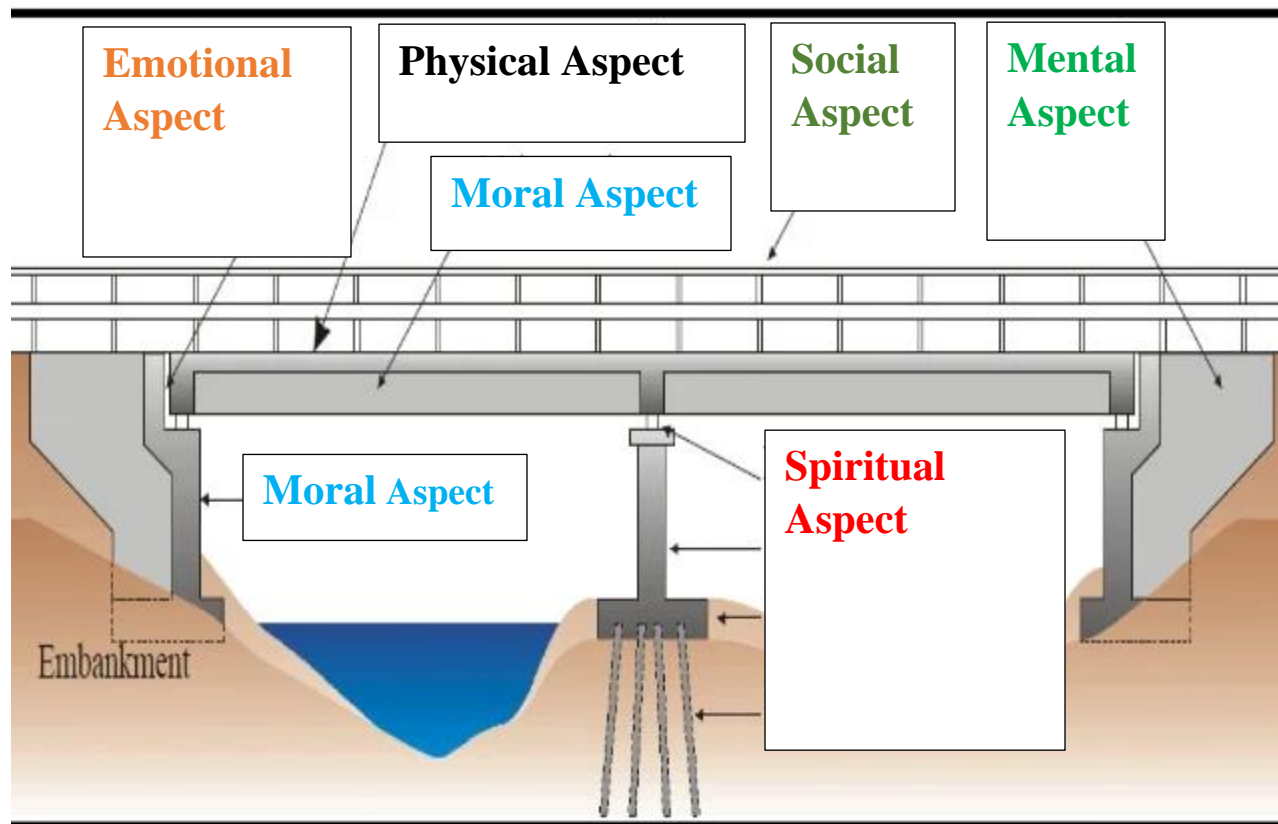


Figure 1. Six aspects of the human person.

Measuring Spiritual Formation

After participants complete the Building Bridges workshop and reflection sessions, they must make a continuing effort to maintain their spiritual formation by nurturing the self and their relationships with others. Spiritual disciplines and discipleship are the hallmarks of a healthy

¹⁶ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 262–266.

relationship because building relationships begins with one's relationship with God, which is characterized by uniqueness, unity, and reciprocity.¹⁷

Spiritual disciplines and discipleship are the tools for spiritual formation in human development. Still, the best predictor of healthy relationships is to what extent the individuals in the relationship are being formed into the image and likeness of Christ. A brief introduction to spiritual disciplines and discipleship is given in the last session of the workshop to assist participants in maintaining the relational skills learned in the workshop. The participants must continue and monitor their spiritual practices to ensure they are experiencing the fullness of Christ in all aspects of their human development.

Bridges must undergo regular inspections that utilize a rating or scale that indicate if the structure is sound, in need of repair, or unfit. This is the same type of scale implemented in the Building Bridges workshop to help participants monitor their healthy relationships and spiritual formation after the workshop is completed. The process of building and maintaining healthy relationships must also undergo periodic inspections to ensure one's spiritual discipline and discipleship are still at an acceptable level on the inspection scale.

One other method that can help individuals maintain an acceptable level between inspections is journaling. Some scholars consider journaling a spiritual discipline, and it is an excellent tool for monitoring what one is practicing and developing a pattern of spiritual formation to the likeness of Christ. Journaling helps individuals form their inward domain into an outward and corporate domain. A journal can be used as a spiritual diary where an individual can document the maintenance of their spiritual formation through intentional spiritual disciplines and ongoing discipleship.

¹⁷ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 244.

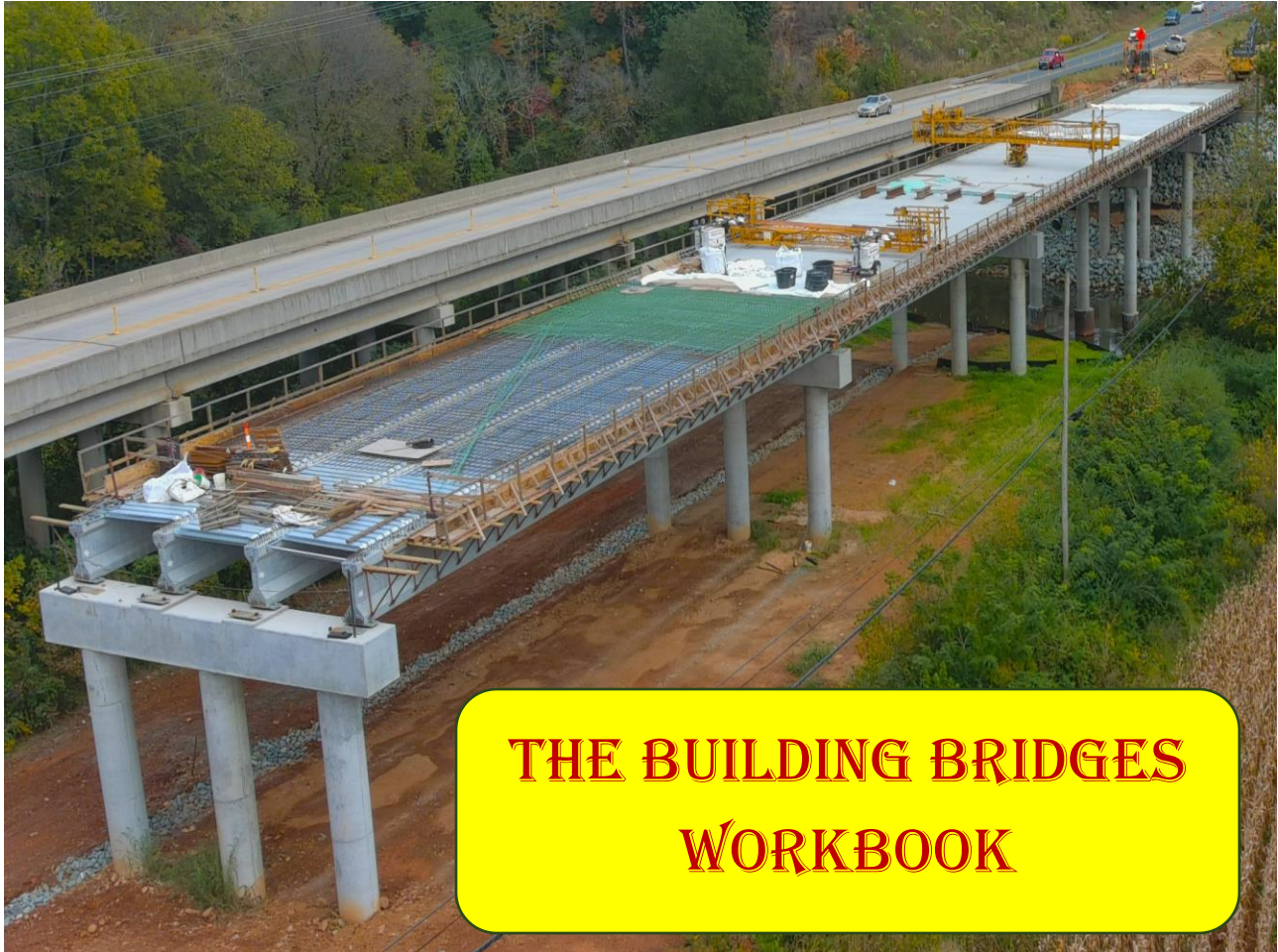
Conclusion

In summary, spiritual formation is the foundation of human development and is meant to be relational. Spiritual formation in human development is reflective of the vertical support system in relationship building. One cannot build healthy relationships without a foundation of love, support piers of trust, and anchor plates of hope. Likewise, individuals cannot develop their emotional, moral, mental, physical, and social domains without spirituality (i.e., a support system) at the core. A transformation must take place inwardly for a person to properly function outwardly and spiritually.

The relational aspect of spiritual formation is built on the premise that God did not intend for Christianity or the ministry to be a solo act. God gave mankind a desire for relationships with God and with others. The six aspects of the human development diagram (Figure 1) can be divided into two domains. The spiritual, emotional, moral, and mental aspects are the inward domain that provides a pattern for spiritual disciplines (i.e., praying, meditation, Bible reading, etc.), and discipleship. The social and physical aspects are the outward domain (i.e., worship, evangelism, spiritual direction, etc.) that is key to spiritual formation and the process of building healthy relationships. The mental, moral, and emotional aspects of human development are part of the substructure, which rests on spirituality as the foundation. In other words, spiritual formation must occur in the inward domain (i.e., through a vertical relationship with God) before the outward domain of social and physical aspects can be fully developed so healthy relationships may exist. When the outward domain is applied to one's spiritual inward domain, the result is a corporate domain of worship, which provides the means for individuals to build healthy relationships with God and others that will ultimately lead to a healthy church.

APPENDIX I

BUILDING BRIDGES WORKBOOK



**THE BUILDING BRIDGES
WORKBOOK**

Printed by UPS Store 6305

Cover image © Wind Walker Aerial Photography,
taken by Steve Xavier (2023), used with permission.

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Session

1

The Preplanning Stage – Phase One: The Inspection

1. Describe what it means to be disconnected.

2. Describe what it means to be connected.

3. What is the significance of inspections?

4. How often should inspections occur? Why?

The Preplanning Stage – Phase One: The Inspection (cont.)

5. Notes or Questions

6. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session One** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

Session 2

The Preplanning Stage – Phase Two: The Blueprint or Planning Phase

1. Describe the meaning of a vertical relationship with God.

2. Why must a plan or blueprint be established for building healthy relationships?

3. What is the significance of intentionally connecting to God and others

4. How does one's vertical relationship affect one's horizontal relationships?

The Preplanning Stage – Phase Two: The Blueprint or Planning Phase (cont.)

5. Notes or Questions

6. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session Two** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

Session 3

The Building Stage – Phase One: Laying the Foundation of Love

1. Describe the importance of a solid foundation when building bridges or relationships.

2. What determines a strong foundation?

3. What is love?

4. Why is love significant?

5. Why is love the foundation for every relationship?

The Building Stage – Phase One: Laying the Foundation of Love (cont.)

6. Notes or Questions

7. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session Three** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

Session 4

The Building Stage – Phase Two: Building the Support Piers of Trust

1. Describe how the support piers of trust and the foundation of love work together.

2. How does trusting God impact one's trust in others?

3. What are the steps to rebuilding trust?

4. Why is trust so critical in relationship building?

The Building Stage – Phase Two: Building the Support Piers of Trust (cont.)

5. Notes or Questions

6. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session Four** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

Session 5

The Building Stage – Phase Three: Attaching the Anchor Plates of Hope

1. Describe how hope relates to relationships.

2. What are the anchors of hope (Heb 6:11-18)?

3. What is the significance of the anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19)?

4. How do love, hope, and trust work to form the substructure of relationships?

The Building Stage – Phase Three: Attaching the Anchor Plates of Hope (cont.)

5. Notes or Questions

6. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session Five** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

Session 6

The Building Stage – Phase Four: The Central Span of Forgiveness

1. What is forgiveness?

2. Why is it important to forgive?

3. How does unforgiveness impact one's relationship with God?

4. How does forgiveness help bridge the gap between disconnection and connection?

Session 7

The Building Stage – Phase Five: Building the Deck of Reconciliation

1. Describe God's plan of reconciliation.

2. What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

3. Is reconciliation necessary for forgiveness? Why or why not?

4. What is the source of reconciliation that reconnects trust, hope, and forgiveness? Explain.

Session

8

The Final Building Stage: The Final Inspection

1. How does the Eph 4:7-16 Model affect church members?

2. What is the impact of the Eph 4:7-16 Model on the church?

3. What is the purpose of the Eph 4:7-16 Model? (more than one answer)

4. Why is continual self-inspection important?

Session 9

The Maintenance Stage: Maintaining the Structure

1. List at least four spiritual disciplines.

2. How can journaling help spiritual growth (spiritual disciplines)?

3. Explain the relationship between human development and spiritual formation.

4. What are the essential characteristics of a disciple?

5. Explain the relationship between community and spiritual formation.

The Maintenance Stage: Maintaining the Structure (cont.)

6. Notes or Questions

7. Homework Assignment

Reflective Journal: **Session Nine** in your own words (**minimum of two sentences**).

APPENDIX J

PARTICIPANT DATASHEET

Title of the Project: Building Bridges: Connecting the Disconnected from God and Others.

Principle Investigator: Jonathan W. Terry, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University
DMIN Candidate

Event: Building Bridges Workshop 2024

	Data Collected from Registration				
Number of participants					
Number of members that would register if there were a morning session*					
Number of those willing to be in a focus group					
number of focus groups needed					
Age Range **	1	2	3	4	
Total					
percentage					
Gender	Male	female			
Total					
percentage					

* Need a minimum of ten to have a morning session

** Age Range (1) 18-25 (2) 26-39 (3) 40-59 (4) 60 or older

APPENDIX K

FOCUS GROUPS

Groups: Groups will be formed depending on how many church members agree to participate in a focus group. The kickoff luncheon and registration form will allow participants the opportunity to sign up for a focus group. The ideal number of participants for each group is ten, with a maximum of fifteen participants. The focus groups are voluntary, so all participants in the workshop may not participate in a focus group. The allowance for those who do not complete the final weeks of the workshop will also be reflected in a lower number for each focus group.

Time: The plan is for the first group to meet at 8:00 PM on Tuesday night after their last session for one hour. The second focus group will meet on Saturday at 12:00 PM, directly following the Saturday morning session.

The Intent: The focus groups must meet directly after each workshop is completed to allow for the most accurate feedback. Measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the workshop is the intent of the focus groups.

Focus Group Discussion:

1. The overall time frame of the Workshop (10 minutes)
 - The number of sessions – additions or subtractions
 - The time for each session- additional time for each segment
2. The effectiveness of the Workbook (10 minutes)
 - Questions - Self-reflection - Journaling
 - Helpful
3. The effectiveness of the ten-minute reflection session at the end of each session (10 minutes)
 - Time – more or less
 - Participation
4. Equipping church members on how to build healthy relationships (10 minutes)
 - The effectiveness of
 - a) Initial and Final Inspection (in the participants' own words) **
 - b) Spiritual relationships and Personal relationships
 - c) Spiritual disciplines and Discipleship
5. The overall effectiveness of the PowerPoint presentation and visual aids (10 minutes)
 - Were participants able to follow.
 - Was it helpful and effective
6. Open Discussion (10 minutes)

**Inspection questionnaires will be compiled and evaluated by the researcher for a measure of the efficiency of the workshop after the focus group meetings are completed.

APPENDIX L

THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION OF THE BUILDING BRIDGES WORKSHOP

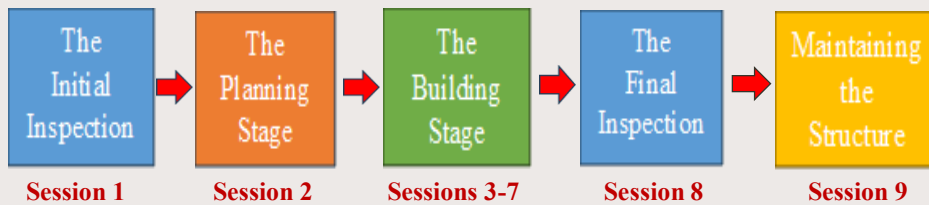


BUILDING BRIDGES WORKSHOP

Jonathan W. Terry

Introduction

Five Stages of Building Bridges



Session One: The Initial Inspection

The Initial Inspection Stage		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Reality and Causes of Disconnections	30 minutes
Part 1	The definition of disconnection	10 minutes
Part 2	Understanding shame, guilt, anger, and bitterness	10 minutes
Part 3	The results of prolonged disconnect	10 minutes
Two	The Reality and Need for Connections	10 minutes
Part 1	The need for one's vertical relationship	5 minutes
Part 2	The Need for One's horizontal relationship	5 minutes
Three	The Initial Inspection Questionnaire	10 minutes
Part 1	Explanation of questionnaire	2 minutes
Part 2	Filling out the questionnaire (anonymously)	8 minutes
Four	Reflection on Session One	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

3

Segment One: The Reality and Causes of Disconnection

The Definition of Disconnection

- ❑ Disconnection results from feelings of hurt, disappointment, loneliness, anger, helplessness, and hopelessness that break one's connections with others.
- ❑ Disconnection often involves traumatic memories that strengthen negative appraisals and rumination, increase the lost sense of self, and negatively impact social relationships.
- ❑ Disconnection is an internal process that influences one's quality of relational communication, social connections, and function.
- ❑ Disconnection is inevitable because no one can perpetually stay in a state of connection. Still, the negative feelings associated with disconnection (i.e., anger and hopelessness) are the body signaling that something is wrong internally.
- ❑ Fallor and Wright note, "Disconnection is the red light that inhibits the flow of connection."
- ❑ It is hard for the disconnected to securely connect to God when the individual is struggling with negative feelings (i.e., sadness, shame, guilt, bitterness, or anger).
- ❑ The tendency is to negate oneself from God and others which contributes to more insecurities, more scars, and more disconnection.
- ❑ The negative emotions associated with disconnection are an immediate reminder that the life flow of connection has been broken.

4

Segment One: The Reality and Causes of Disconnection (cont.)

The Causes of Disconnections

- ❑ **Shame:** Shame is often a response to one's feeling of helplessness, a violation of bodily integrity, and the indignity suffered in the eyes of another person. The negative inward emotions induced by shame will always bring negative self concept, doubt, and hopelessness that leads individuals to feel diminished, defeated, or worthless which makes it difficult to maintain relationships. Shame attacks one's dignity, identity, selfworth, and relationships.
- ❑ **Guilt:** Self is not the focus of guilt, but the dysfunctions in relationships created by guilt may lie dormant for years before surfacing. Guilt is often trauma associated with loss, physical/sexual abuse, or bullying.
- ❑ **Anger:** The enormously painful emotions associated with shame are similarly expressed in anger. Rage and bitterness are often a result of anger but can also become a springboard for change.
- ❑ **Bitterness:** Unresolved bitterness coincides with unexpressed emotions of anger and bitterness that haunt present relationships and become the source of lingering conflicts. "It only takes occasional bitterness to poison a situation or relationship."
- ❑ **Unforgiveness:** Unforgiveness will cause feelings of anger or resentment toward the offender and hinder one's ability to connect to others, which involves personal change and forgiveness to heal. The start of the healing process for the scar of unforgiveness is learning to forgive oneself. A lack of forgiveness will hinder one's relationship with God and others (Matt 6:15, 18:21-35)

5

Segment One: The Reality and Causes of Disconnection (cont.)

The Results of Prolonged Disconnect

- ❑ **Withdrawal:** The disconnection of withdrawal is a barrier that is put up to protect oneself from feeling pain. Relational avoidance is a type of withdrawal that fails to let others know about their hurt by keeping it to themselves and turning away from other relationships, which also directly relates to the disconnection of secrecy
- ❑ **Isolation:** Both secular and religious literature will agree that isolation is nearing rock bottom for those dealing with disconnection that leads to dysfunctional relationships. Isolation along with shame prevents many individuals from asking for or accepting help.
- ❑ **Dissociation:** A process that refers to an automatic and spontaneous division between one's thought process and personal awareness. The source of dissociation is almost always from a traumatic origin. The defense mechanism most common in individuals experiencing PTSD symptoms is dissociation.
- ❑ **Secrecy:** Secrecy is hiding in one's hurt and vulnerability that dwindles one's ability to engage or connect with God and others. Secrecy is the hidden hurt that cannot be examined, known, or repaired from the outside (i.e., counseling, mentoring, or coaching), but affects every relationship until the hurt surfaces. The inwardness of secrecy blocks many of the relational skills needed throughout life and counseling efforts.

6

Segment Two: The Reality and Need for connections

The Need for a Vertical Relationship

- ❑ God's plan: God built us for relationships with Him and others
- ❑ Building inwardly and upwardly: Traumatic events or experiences can affect an individual's spirituality by interrupting, altering, or severing one's beliefs (i.e., values, goals, and perceptions of events). When one's spirituality becomes affected by trauma, hurt, or loss then one's spiritual relationships are also affected. The need is for an inward transformation.
- ❑ Every spiritual relationship requires a spiritual formation that goes beyond a mere outward form and focuses on being formed to the likeness of Christ (Gal 4:19). The purpose of a spiritual relationship is not just physicality or spirituality but godliness. God calls believers to be holy (1 Pet 1:16) and to exercise godliness (1 Tim 4:7–8).

The Need for a Horizontal Relationship

- ❑ Studies have shown that strong personal relationships are the best predictor of a happy and fulfilling life.
- ❑ Personal relationships not only produce happiness but also provide relaxation to help ward off any negative effects of stress.

7

Segment Three: The Initial Inspection

The Initial Inspection

- ❑ Every Bridge has a scheduled inspection that determines the quality of the bridge for further use.
- ❑ A rating scale from 0–9 is formed to rate a bridge structure, usage, and deterioration (age). The lower the score determines the repair or closure that is needed.
- ❑ If an inspection drops below 4 there must be a game plan put in place (repair or rebuild).
- ❑ The inspection provides information so that engineers can make plans for improvements.
- ❑ These plans take many years to plan.
- ❑ These will lead us to next week's session on planning and blueprint stage

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Session Two: The Planning Stage

The Planning Stage		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship	30 minutes
Part 1	Building Bridges Bible verse – Eph 4:31–32 (KJV)	5 minutes
Part 2	Planning For a vertical relationship with God	5 minutes
Part 3	Establishing a blueprint for a healthy relationship with God and others	20 minutes
Two	Blueprint for Personal Healthy Relationships	20 minutes
Part 1	A Blueprint for One's Horizontal Relationship	10 minutes
Part 2	The Importance of connecting to others (part 1 and part 2)	10 minutes
Three	Reflection on Session Two	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

9

Segment One: Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship

Building Bridges Bible Verse

Eph 4:31–32 (KJV)

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking Be put away from you, with all malice:”



“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

10

Segment One: Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship (cont.)

Planning For a Vertical Relationship with God

- ❑ Building a spiritually (vertical) healthy relationship with God does not happen by chance or without a plan. In comparison, a bridge cannot be built without a plan or a blueprint.
- ❑ A healthy relationship with God often determines one's relationship with others. Just as an unhealthy relationship with God can negatively affect one's relationship with others.
- ❑ Many Christians have difficulty with their sense of worth or confusion of identity because it is often based on how others perceive them and not from God's perspective (i.e., spiritual lens).
- ❑ Confusion of identity will cause a strain on one's vertical relationship with God that will impact one's horizontal relationships with others.
- ❑ A spiritual relationship is the process of spiritual change or soul growth, but this transformation of the soul requires work and effort.
- ❑ Every bridge construction must have a plan to implement that effectively communicates and executes the process of building the bridge and one's relationship with God needs an intentional plan.
- ❑ A plan includes effort, time, and a blueprint to begin building.
- ❑ A spiritually healthy relationship with God begins at salvation. One must be saved to build a relationship with God.

11

Segment One: Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship (cont.)

Planning For a Vertical Relationship with God

- ❑ Bridges and relationships are not intended to be built alone.
- ❑ God created mankind with a desire for relationships with Him and others
- ❑ The key to healthy relationships is one's connection with God and then others.
- ❑ The blueprint for building healthy relationships fills the gap between disconnection and connection.
- ❑ The blueprint for building healthy relationships provides the details necessary to build spiritually healthy relationships.
- ❑ A healthy vertical relationship with God will allow for a healthy spiritual relationship with other Christians.
- ❑ A healthy vertical relationship with God will transform one's inward self (heart, mind, and soul).
- ❑ A healthy vertical relationship with God will increase one's ability to worship both individually and corporately.

12

Segment One: Blueprint for Spiritual Healthy Relationship (cont.)

Establishing a Blueprint for a Healthy Relationship with God and Others

- ❑ Establish a place to build– Where are you going to do the work of building bridges (relationships)?
- ❑ Establish a time to build– When are you going to start building the bridge of healthy relationships?
- ❑ Establish a plan – What is your plan? (inwardly, upwardly, outwardly)
- ❑ Establish a crew – With one or two people(those to help with encouragement and accountability).
- ❑ Initial Inspection – **Identify** areas of repair
- ❑ Initial Inspection – **Set goals** for building
- ❑ Initial Inspection – **Implement your plan** by using your blueprints

13

Segment Two: Blueprint for personal Healthy Relationship

A Blueprint for One's Horizontal Relationship

- ❑ A horizontal relationship blueprint cannot be properly executed without a plan for a vertical relationship with God.
- ❑ Healthy relationships require commitment and continuous investments to become lasting relationships.
- ❑ Building bridges of healthy personal relationships must implement an intentional plan and blueprints.
- ❑ The brain is socially constructed through human relationships and wired for potential optimal social development that produces one's systems of trust, hope, self-esteem, and connectedness.

14

Segment Two: Blueprint for Personal Healthy Relationship (cont.)

The Importance of Connecting to Others (Part 1)

- ❑ The ability to repair the disconnected does not require the individual to return to his or her broken relationships but to build new relationships.
- ❑ The debris of disconnect must be cleared away before construction (building relationship) can begin.
- ❑ Social relationships have proven to positively influence one's coping ability.
- ❑ The problem is the number of connections in relationshipbuilding has increased by the sheer volume of interaction, but the quality of connections in relationshipbuilding is decreasing.
- ❑ The need to bond is why most people do not spend their time wandering in solitary bliss.
- ❑ Personal relationships access one's interior self and inner values which are necessary for regaining one's dignity, identity, and trust.

15

Segment Two: Blueprint for Personal Healthy Relationship (cont.)

The Importance of Connecting to Others (Part 2)

- ❑ Faller and Wright divulge in *True Connections* that one of the bridges to connections is vulnerability because one's vulnerability can repair that which is divided.
- ❑ Brokenness and vulnerability are not only the condition most people are in when they get saved but it is the condition that most people get to before addressing the condition of their relationships because broken, damaged, and imperfect are the common thread of all humanity that leads to the vulnerability to change.
- ❑ Vulnerabilities are often protection agents for the disconnected that keep individuals from connecting, but vulnerabilities can also be the key to resilience and restoration that leads to healthy relationships.
- ❑ Honesty within an individual requires a vulnerability that may include some risk to your self -identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.
- ❑ A sense of vulnerability is often experienced in rebuilding broken trust and rebuilding trust facilitates reconciliation.
- ❑ Trusting others and safe personal relationships are essential to trusting oneself.

16

Session Three: The Building Stage

Laying the Foundation		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Foundation of Love	50 minutes
Part 1	The foundation of one's emotions – The iceberg effect	10 minutes
Part 2	The importance of solid foundation	10 minutes
Part 3	The foundation for Building Bridges of healthy relationships is love	10 minutes
Part 4	Pouring the foundation with the love of Christ	10 minutes
Part 5	Setting the foundation of love	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Three	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

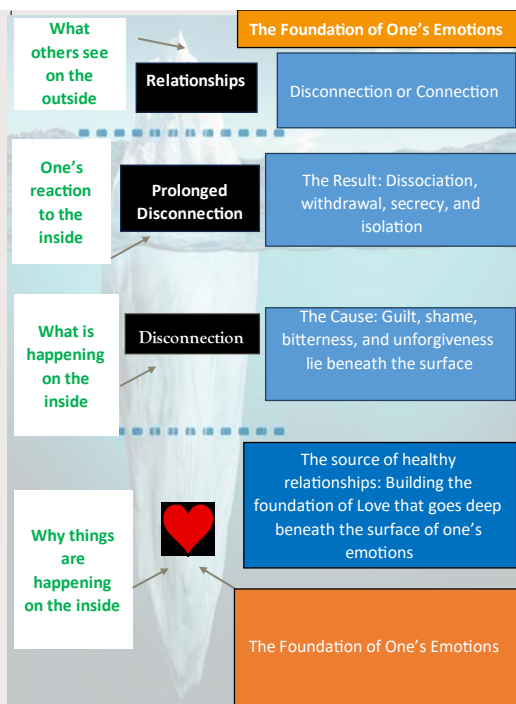
17

Segment One: The Foundation of Love – Part One

The Foundation of One's Emotions

Iceberg Effect

- The deck is the visual evidence of the building done below the surface.
 - One's outward appearance and emotions
 - What others see on the outside
- The superstructure is the means to build the deck.
 - One's behavior and feelings
 - What is happening on the inside
- The substructure is the support and foundation that reaches deep beneath the surface
 - The foundation of one's emotions
 - The foundation of love must start here



Segment One: The Foundation of Love Part Two

The Importance of Solid Foundation

- ❑ Building Bridges requires a solid foundation that must be the ultimate priority in the building process.
- ❑ Building relationships also requires a solid foundation that must be the ultimate priority in the relationship building process.
- ❑ A contractor cannot build a bridge with only a foundation or build a bridge without a foundation.
- ❑ A solid foundation that cannot be physically or spiritually shaken (Luke 6:48).
- ❑ A solid foundation that can withstand the storms of life.
- ❑ A solid foundation that can withhold the weight of traffic (trials).
- ❑ A solid foundation must be dug deep beneath the surface.
- ❑ Building relationships begins with digging deep below the surface of one's inward self (i.e., iceberg model).
- ❑ The foundation of a bridge requires piers, anchors, and a deck to effectively complete a bridge project and every relationship must be built on a foundation of love.
- ❑ The act of love is the universal motivator of life that drives individuals to do what is necessary to meet the needs of others

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Segment One: The Foundation of Love Part Three

The Foundation for Building Bridges of Healthy Relationships is Love

- ❑ **Love** is a biblical principle that is the foundation of all relationship building.
- ❑ God is Love. Thus, God should be at the forefront of every old or new relationship.
- ❑ Scripturally, believers are to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and walk in love (Eph 5:2) as a portrayal of Christ that manifests the love of Christ toward fellow believers by showing genuine forgiveness (Eph 5:1-2).
- ❑ God designed the church to be a family in a community of believers that are fitly joined together through edification and love (Eph 4:15-16).
- ❑ A Gospel-centered love that allows the gospel to shape one's mind and relationships but not conform to the world's customs (Rom 12:1-2) is what needs to saturate FBCGA.
- ❑ The foundation of relationship building is love because it begins with a vertical relationship with Christ that is inextricably linked with a horizontal relationship with fellow Christians (Col 1:4).
- ❑ Love is the bonding agent that allows one's inner spiritual center which is one's vertical relationship with God to connect to the volitional, intellectual, and emotional aspects of a person that forms a psychical unity with others by having been knitted together in love (Col 2:2; 3:14).

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Segment One: The Foundation of Love Part Three (cont.)

The Foundation for Building Bridges of Healthy Relationships is Love

- ❑ If a foundation of love does not reach deep beneath the surface of emotions, then individuals will often divert back to or continue to deny their pain, loss, grief, and feelings. This allows individuals to slowly transform into an empty shell with a smiley face painted on them.
- ❑ The foundation of one's emotions must be love which allows individuals to focus on one positive emotion and not a wider range of negative emotions (i.e., depression, fear, anger, and bitterness).
- ❑ The desire to love is one's need to connect due to his or her built-in desire to belong, connect, and explore the world.
- ❑ The pursuit of love and compassion are keys to healthy relationships and interpersonal forgiveness that produces positive emotional forgiveness toward others.

21

Segment One: The Foundation of Love Part four

Pouring the Foundation with the Love of Christ

- ❑ The New Testament reveals that God is the source of love (1 John 4:7-8, 16) that gives mankind the ability to experience and express the fullness of love in all relationships.
- ❑ God provides the greatest example of love and the cost of the greatness of his love when His own beloved Son was given as a sacrifice for sinners (John 3:16, Rom 5:8, 8:32).
- ❑ Christ's example and command for all Christians to love one another (John 13:34-35, 15:12, 17) is the foundation for building healthy relationships.
- ❑ Jesus emphasizes a human-divine relationship that is rooted in love and not fear (1 John 4:18-21).
- ❑ No bridge or relationship can be built without a solid foundation, and the love of Christ is the solid foundation of relationships.
- ❑ The love of Christ must be the foundation of every healthy relationship.
- ❑ A church member cannot authentically claim to love God without loving those within the beloved community of believers (2 John 1:4-6).

22

Segment One: The Foundation of Love Part Five

Setting the Foundation

- ❑ Individuals do not learn love by trying because love is something received before love becomes something one gives. The key to learning how to love is experiencing love and then passing it on.
- ❑ The emotional bond of love provides an antidote to stress and anxiety through high degrees of engagement, vulnerability, and responsiveness.
- ❑ The premise of love is a commitment to honoring, serving, and forgiving others.
- ❑ The product of love is helping others find freedom and hope in Christ that connects them to a personal relationship with a loving God.
- ❑ Real love is sincere, whole-hearted, and gospel-centered not hypocritical, ritual, out of duty, or marked out of mere platitudes (Rom 12:9–10).
- ❑ Love is being an active listener who gives his or her full attention to others, and notices when others need encouragement.

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Session Four: The Building Stage

Building the Support Piers of Trust		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Support Piers of Trust	50 minutes
Part 1	Building trust in God	20 minutes
Part 2	Building trust in others	10 minutes
Part 3	Building trust in oneself	10 minutes
Part 4	Building broken trust	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Four	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

24

Segment One: The Support Piers of Trust Part One

Building Trust in God

- ❑ The support piers of trust are built on the foundation of love.
- ❑ A decision to trust should be based on God which allows individuals to grow in faith, deepen his or her intimacy with God, and be conformed to the image of Christ and not based on one's circumstances.
- ❑ Circumstances should never change one's trust in God because no matter the storm one may be experiencing God's presence remains and God will use the storms of life for His purpose, glory, and for good.
- ❑ The formation of trust begins with an inward transformation of the whole heart and a vertical relationship with God (Ps 71:5, 118:8-9, Prov 3:5, 1 Tim 4:10).
- ❑ Jesus taught the multitude not to worry about their life because worrying does not add anything to one's life span (Matt 6:25-27).
- ❑ God's word is pure and a shield to those who trust Him (Prov 30:5).

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man"

Ps 118:8

25

Segment One: The Support Piers of Trust Part One

Building Trust in God (cont.)

- ❑ Worrying is pointless, fruitless, and foolish, affecting one's relationships with God and quality of life.
- ❑ Worrying is a sign that one does not adequately know God, trust Him, or yield to Him.
- ❑ Jesus can be trusted unconditionally by those who will choose to follow him.
- ❑ Trusting in God provides a sanctuary for the believer (Isa 8:14) and confidence in God's promises that were followed by Christ (Heb 2:13).
- ❑ The benefit of a godly trust is freedom from self and a cure for worry and anxiety which allows individuals to build a healthy relationship with God that can influence one's relationship building with others.
- ❑ God's instruction is to trust him (Prov 3:5)
- ❑ David's instruction is to trust God all of the time (Ps 62:8)

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

Prov 3:5

26

Segment One: The Support Piers of Trust Part Two

Building Trust in Others

- ❑ Trusting God can help restore one's trust in others.
- ❑ While other support piers could be considered, trust is critical to relationship building.
- ❑ There is no healthy relationship without trust.
- ❑ Building trust is a crucial aspect of building and connecting relationships because trust must be established before healing the hurts of anger, shame, and guilt can begin.
- ❑ The process of building support piers of trust and building a relationship of love breeds hope that allows connectivity both spiritually and personally
- ❑ Trust plays a major role in forgiveness and reconciliation
- ❑ Forgiveness is often an expression of trust, mutual satisfaction, and a shift in one's selfidentity
- ❑ Reconciliation denotes the process of building trust and positive relationships

27

Segment One: The Support Piers of Trust Part Three

Building Trust in Oneself

- ❑ Trust is a principle of action that builds on one's faith
- ❑ When trust is erased and eradicated, the human spirit is deadened, and the individual becomes a body reduced to unconscious survival.
- ❑ Conversely, a lack of trust and a lack of vulnerability are often the byproducts of anxiety that produce trust in idols rather than trusting in God's goodness and power.
- ❑ Anger and mistrust are often directed at God when death, loss, or trauma is experienced but the support needed in these life-altering experiences is to trust in God as a support pier of one's heart and future relationships.
- ❑ Building trusting oneself is not saying one can do it without trusting God, it is saying everyone can trust God in building support piers of trust in the process of building new relationships.
- ❑ Trusting oneself means turning to God when individuals do not know what to do (2 Chron 20:12)

*"O our God. . . we have no might against this great company that cometh against us;
neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."*

2 Chron 20:12

28

Segment One: The Support Piers of Trust Part Four

Building Broken Trust

- ❑ A lack of self-forgiveness from broken trust will impede the building process of trust.
- ❑ A bridge cannot be completed without support piers and relationships cannot be built without support piers of trust.
- ❑ One cannot go from a foundation of love to forgiveness or reconciliation without trust.
- ❑ Likewise, a bridge cannot go from the foundation to the deck without support piers (use visual aid – photos of bridges).
- ❑ Take a ride down I-485 in Southeast Charlotte and see how many support piers are being built.
- ❑ While a foundation will most often weather the storms and bear the weight of the traffic flow, it is the support piers that take the brunt of the damage.
- ❑ Many bridges have had to close and undergo construction due to fire or accidents that have damaged the support piers, but because the foundation is solid the support piers can be repaired.
- ❑ Building broken trust begins by recognizing that the foundation of love is still strong and building trust is built on new relationships with God and others.

29

Session Five: The Building Stage

Attaching the Anchor Plates of Hope

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Anchor Plates of Hope	50 minutes
Part 1	Anchored in hope	10 minutes
Part 2	Anchored in God's promises (Heb 6:11–16)	10 minutes
Part 3	Anchored in God's Word (Heb 6:17–18)	15 minutes
Part 4	Anchored in Jesus Christ, the anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19)	15 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Five	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

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SEGMENT ONE: THE ANCHOR PLATES OF HOPE PART ONE

Anchored in Hope

- REMINDER: New bridges of relationships and the change that needs to occur are done one step at a time because changes in relationships happen incrementally.
- Anchor plates may not be necessary for all bridge constructions, but they are instrumental in building healthy relationships.
- Bridges have both vertical (substructure) and horizontal (superstructure) anchor plates and relationships need to have both vertical and horizontal anchor plates of hope.
- Hope is the anchor plate of relationships.
- Hope helps secure the substructure of relationships (the foundation of love and support piers of trust).
- Hope looks forward with anticipation as a strengthening element that anchors the support piers of trust and faith.
- Hope allows individuals to look forward with great promise.
- The promise of hope replaces doubts and selfpity with a new sense of confidence that builds on spiritual insights, values, and goals.
- Hope does not only help the disconnected to become connected, but it also helps the pastor, counselor, or mentor remain focused on God amid such difficult work

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Segment One: The Anchor Plates of Hope Part One

Anchored in Hope (cont.)

- Don Parker, a longtime educator and principal, uses the building bridges metaphor to foster hope in his students as displayed in his book. He defines hope as a psychological strength that functions as a buffer between difficult experiences and well-being. Dr. Parker instills in his teachers and counselors to counter the feelings of hopelessness by fostering hope and a positive outlook.
- This kind of hope is one of the goals that the Building Bridges workshop seeks to accomplish at FBGA.
- Jennifer Ripley and Everett Worthington Jr. provide fifteen **HOPE interventions**. HOPE is a strategy for change by implementing **H**andling **O**ur **P**roblems **E**ffectively through behavioral-based interventions.
- Some of these interventions are love, prayer, focus on Christian virtues, and stopping negative reciprocity.
- Negative reciprocity (res·i·proc·i·ty) is a relationship stressor that begins with one negative action that is followed by a negative reaction that fuels a negative cycle of continual negativity with an increased fury which explains an individual's hostile or brutal behavior within a relationship.

32

Segment One: The Anchor Plates of Hope Part Two

Anchored in God's Promises

- ❑ Hope is also a biblical principle that provides an anchor for healthy relationships.
- ❑ Hope is based on a God that cannot lie and His grace (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18)
- ❑ A hope that is firm and secure because of the faithfulness of God in exalting his crucified Son to heaven.
- ❑ Hope is confirmed by God's Word as a promise directly from God as guaranteed by God (Heb 6:13).
- ❑ This hope is an inviolable (unbreakable) promise of God that is intended to give strong encouragement to believers and not an abstract truth unrelated to life.
- ❑ The assurance of hope is in the presence of God (Heb 6:19) and nothing can dislodge this hope from the believer for hope is an objective reality.
- ❑ Hope is the source of every believer as God's promise of eternal life that none should perish or be able to be "plucked" out of God's hand (John 3:15,16, 10:28). This hope is Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior, which is available to every non-believer.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."

Ps 31:24

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Segment One: The Anchor Plates of Hope Part Three

Anchored in God's Word

- ❑ God's Word is "my rock" and "my fortress" that can be anchored (Ps 18:2, 31:3, 62:2, 6).
- ❑ God's Word is the rock of my strength (Ps 62:7).
- ❑ There is hope in God's Word (Ps 119: 81, 114)
- ❑ The hope of the Gospels provides a hope for heaven (Col 1:45).
- ❑ Christ is the hope of salvation (1 Thes 5:8), the hope of glory (Col 1:27), and the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2, 3:7).
- ❑ The Word of God cannot be broken (John 10:35).
- ❑ The reliability of God's Word provides the premise for the promise of hope.

"Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word."

Ps 119:114

34

Segment One: The Anchor Plates of Hope Part Four

An Anchor of the Soul

- ❑ The anchor of hope that is established in Jesus Christ is the kind of hope that one can build healthy relationships.
- ❑ The anchor that is steadfast and sure as the anchor of one's soul (Heb 6:11–19).
- ❑ Rebuilding broken trust begins with anchoring one's soul in the hope of Jesus Christ (Heb 6:19).
- ❑ This promise of hope is secured by Christ as the High Priest who has entered heaven on behalf of mankind to open the way to heaven (Heb 6:13–7:28).
- ❑ The most deeply wounded, fragmented, or damaged individuals can have hope through the presence of a miracle working God and one's relationship with God.
- ❑ Individuals who are hurting need empathetic encouragement conveyed by God's hope, peace, comfort, and power amid the hurt.
- ❑ Christ, as the anchor of the soul, offers a lively hope (1 Pet 1:3) and a blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast”

Heb 6:19

35

Session Six: The Building Stage

Building the Central Span of Forgiveness

Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Central Span of Forgiveness	50 minutes
Part 1	Forgiveness – God	20 minutes
Part 2	Forgiveness – Others	20 minutes
Part 3	Forgiveness – Self	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Six	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness

Forgiveness – God

- ❑ Forgiveness is another biblical principle that is vital to building relationships.
- ❑ God forgives our sins (Ps 103:3). God forgets our sin (Heb8:12, 10:17)
- ❑ Paul teaches his audiences the importance of forgiving one another by giving Christ through God's act as an example (2 Cor 2:7–10, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13).
- ❑ There is no greater example, motivation, or pattern for forgiving others than God's forgiveness of our sins through Christ.
- ❑ Jesus provides complete forgiveness of sin by His atoning death (Heb 8:12).
- ❑ Christ brings a genuine and lasting forgiveness that creates a transformation in believers that is based on the sacrificial work of Christ.
- ❑ This forgiveness allows individuals to have confidence and boldness to enter the presence of God because of the work of Christ as the high priest (Heb4:14–16).

“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Heb 10:17

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness

Forgiveness – God (cont.)

- ❑ Forgiveness comes from a tender heart and Christ is the ultimate model of forgiveness by His instruction and example (Matt 18:32–35, Eph 4:32, Col 3:13).
- ❑ Jesus also provides instruction on forgiveness in **His model prayer** (Matt 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4) and in **His teachings** (Matt 6:14–15, 11: 25–26).
- ❑ Jesus not only commanded forgiveness in His teaching but He lived it by becoming the offering so that mankind could have forgiveness of sin (Rom 5:8).
- ❑ Christ provides an example of forgiveness that goes far beyond restoring what Adam lost by forgiving the multitude of transgressions of all sinners, by providing the gift of eternal life and by giving people a clean state before God (Rom 5:12–21).
- ❑ Forgiveness is the core divine attribute that brings one into God's community (Eph 1:7, 4:32, Col 3:13) and allows Christ to willingly take on that which sinners deserve to clear a path for the transformation to a new life.
- ❑ Forgiveness not only points to the continuing character of forgiveness (Matt 8:21–22, Luke 17:3–4), but it also instills the idea that being forgiving is being gracious to one another
- ❑ Forgiveness goes against one's sense of justice, but the freedom of forgiveness gives one the ability to live with the consequences of someone else's sin

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness

Forgiveness – Others

- ❑ The qualifier for God’s forgiveness is to forgive others and the chief evidence of a penitent heart toward God is a forgiving spirit.
- ❑ The act of forgiveness is the chief means of dealing with and repairing relationships that have been corroded or disrupted with hurt and negative feelings.
- ❑ The process of forgiveness is a transformation of feelings from retaliation and avoidance to an act of benevolence toward the transgressor and emotional and decisional forgiveness.
- ❑ Christ is our example for forgiving others (Eph 4:32, Col 3:13).
- ❑ Confession of sin allows God’s cleansing and forgiveness of all sin and unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), which opens one’s heart for forgiving others and self.
- ❑ Forgiveness is not always focused on building relationships but rather on being obedient to what God has instructed Christians to do. Yet, one’s obedience to God is instrumental (necessary tool) in building relationships.

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

Col 3:13

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness

Forgiveness – Others (cont.)

- ❑ Forgiveness is at the **centerpiece of Christianity** and effective pastoral counseling
- ❑ The motivation for forgiveness is found in the command of Christ (Matt 6:12, 14–15) and in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35) which encourages individuals to forgive out of duty, responsibility, accountability, desire to please God, and desire to avoid displeasing God.
- ❑ We can forgive others because we have been forgiven.
- ❑ C.S. Lewis states, “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”
- ❑ Forgiveness is a process that begins with the decision to forgive. The decision to forgive does not heal all the damaged emotions.
- ❑ Forgiveness does not automatically remove anger, broken trust, fear, bitterness, guilt it is a process of forgiveness that works on these emotions to create positive emotions and relationships.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Eph 4:32

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness

Forgiveness – Self

- ❑ The starting point for forgiveness can be defined in time but is not a onetime event because it is also a journey into one's inner healing that may require the uncovering of various layers of wounds over time.
- ❑ Most researchers will agree that self-forgiveness is relevant when one has transgressed against his or her values which includes experiencing some sense of self-condemnation associated with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral sequelae (a secondary result or an aftereffect of a disease, condition, or injury).
- ❑ Self-forgiveness promotes moral and relationship repair through trust, self-trust, empathy, and a willingness to reconcile.
- ❑ The process of forgiveness is a transformation of feelings from retaliation and avoidance to an act of benevolence toward the transgressor and **emotional** and **decisional** forgiveness.

*“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of his grace;”*

Eph 1:7

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness (cont.)

Forgiveness – Self (Cont.)

Decisional Forgiveness

- ❑ A person-to-person decision that does not seek revenge whether implicit or explicit but treats the intended person as a valuable person.
- ❑ Decisional forgiveness is an **intentional behavior** decision to forswear revenge but to forbear the expression of anger about the transgression.
- ❑ Decisional forgiveness is an **act or decision** that communicates the intent toward a change or transformation of feelings.
- ❑ Decisional forgiveness is a **decision-based choice** based on a person's behavioral intentions, restraining adverse behaviors, and values of social harmony and graciousness often associated with religious beliefs from an intrapersonal perspective that is used as a coping mechanism and normally affects one's emotional forgiveness.
- ❑ Decisional forgiveness helps maintain relational harmony by replacing negative emotions with positive ones.

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness (cont.)

Forgiveness – Self (cont.)

Emotional Forgiveness

- ❑ In most cases, decisional forgiveness comes before emotional forgiveness, because it is the notion of decision that allows individuals to see themselves behaving with forgiveness in a benevolent way that allows one to regulate their emotions from negative to positive.
- ❑ Emotional forgiveness replaces resentment, bitterness, anger, and fear with empathy, sympathy, compassion, and love which produces a change in motives as forgiving is experienced.
- ❑ Emotional forgiveness relates to personal healing and has more health and well-being consequences.
- ❑ Emotional forgiveness is a transformation from a negative unforgiving emotion to an improved state.
- ❑ Emotional forgiveness can be understood as sentiments that reflect the transformation of feelings and motivation away from retaliation and avoidance toward a feeling of benevolence to the transgressor

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness (cont.)

Forgiveness – Self (cont.)

- ❑ Marilyn Cornish and Nathaniel Wade present the **four Rs** of **genuine self-forgiveness** as a therapeutic model. These four components of **responsibility, remorse, restoration, and renewal**.
- ❑ Everett Worthington Jr.'s REACH forgiveness model is a Christian-based model that allows the Holy Spirit to build forgiveness into one's character.
- ❑ The **REACH** forgiveness invites **decisional forgiveness** while moving toward **emotional forgiveness**.
- ❑ This five-step model ends with an encouragement to revisit **decisional forgiveness**.
 - Recall the hurt
 - Emotionally replace negative with positive emotions (i.e., empathy)
 - Altruistic gift of forgiveness (i.e., unselfish, self-sacrificing, considerate, compassionate)
 - Commitment to the forgiveness experienced
 - Hold on to forgiveness when doubt comes

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Segment One: The Central Span of Forgiveness (cont.)

Forgiveness – Self (cont.)

- ❑ Forgiveness provides for oneself and others a release of guilt, remorse, regret, and ruminations.
- ❑ Rumination in psychology refers to repetitive and passive thoughts focused on the causes and effects of a person's distress. However, these thoughts do not lead to the person engaging in active coping mechanisms or problem solving strategies that would relieve distress and improve mood.
- ❑ Forgiveness is often impeded by rumination. On the other hand, forgiveness reduces rumination.
- ❑ The relentless questioning of past failures and experience directly affects one's emotions and thoughts which directly affects one's relationships.
- ❑ Rumination focuses on a problem for more than a few idle minutes, often leaving one feeling worse than before, and has no movement toward accepting and moving forward or a viable solution.
- ❑ Rumination is not intentional but often escalates when one cannot let go of something frustrating, threatening, or insulting.
- ❑ Rumination is typically a negative thought pattern, and reflection is normally a positive thought pattern
- ❑ Rumination negates regular problem-solving and keeps one stuck in unproductively negative thought patterns.

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Session Seven: The Building Stage

Building the Deck of Reconciliation		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	The Deck of Reconciliation	50 minutes
Part 1	Introduction to reconciliation	10 minutes
Part 2	God's plan of reconciliation	10 minutes
Part 3	Connecting reconciliation and trust	10 minutes
Part 4	Connecting reconciliation and hope	10 minutes
Part 5	Connecting reconciliation and forgiveness	10 minutes
Two	Reflection on Session Seven	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation

Introduction

- ❑ Building the deck must be the last phase of building the bridge that builds on the substructures and superstructure of love, trust, hope, and forgiveness.
- ❑ Session seven is the deck-building stage of the bridge-building process that will complete stage three.
- ❑ The deck of reconciliation finalizes the gap between disconnect and healthy relationships with God and others.
- ❑ Building the deck represents building healthy relationships through reconciliation.
- ❑ Reconciliation is not forgiveness, but it is often associated with forgiveness.
- ❑ Mutual satisfaction of the need to satisfy psychological needs (i.e., power, status, respect, belonging, identity, and moral integrity) is a facilitator for reconciliation
- ❑ A willingness to change or unwillingness will dictate the future direction of the relationship between the victim and offender and could establish a disconnect from establishing new relationships.

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation (cont.)

God's Plan of Reconciliation

- ❑ God's plan of reconciliation must be recognized as the source of reconciliation before connecting reconciliation to trust, hope, and forgiveness.
- ❑ A relationship with Christ also introduces the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–21).
- ❑ When relationships, loving, and celebrating life are marred by the scars of life, God has a plan of reconciliation that will restore joy to one's wounded heart.
- ❑ The gospel gift of reconciliation is found in peace.
- ❑ The process of reconciliation reflects the choice to exercise one's God-given faith potential, put hope in action, and love God, others, and oneself, which gives evidence of God's faithful presence in his or her life
- ❑ Jesus suffered mankind's separation. In other words, the cry on the cross (Matt 27:45-46) was not a cry of unbelief, confusion, or despair but an act of separation from God for the reconciliation of mankind. Jesus provided the example and act of reconciliation that builds relationships with God and others.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”

2 Cor 5:18-19

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation (Cont.)

God's Plan of Reconciliation (Cont.)

- ❑ Reconciliation is not about revenge or overcoming evil with evil, it is overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:17–21). Paul uses the term “overcome” as a military term that means “to defeat, conquer” (Rom 12:21). In other words, either one will be defeated by evil, or one will conquer and defeat evil by responding to evil with good.
- ❑ Timothy Keller uses Romans 12:14–21 to present five ways to overcome evil with good. Two of these ways specifically apply to the building bridges concept of building healthy relationships.
 - 1) Pray for those who have hurt or done evil, because it is hard for an individual to stay angry at someone if he or she is praying for them (v. 14).
 - 2) Forgive those who have hurt or done evil because forgiveness is turning away from the pursuit of revenge or repaying evil for evil (v. 17).

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation (cont.)

Connecting Reconciliation and Trust

- ❑ The first step in reconciliation is rebuilding broken trust and confidence in a relationship that can only be repaired over time through reestablishing emotional connection, engaging in honest dialogue, and exhibiting predictable behavior patterns.
- ❑ Trust is easily broken and often difficult to rebuild the breach of trust in a relationship, but the success of reconciliation depends on whether one's trust is trust-busting or trust-building.
- ❑ The capacity to reconcile a relationship is rooted in empathy and the ability to feel together mutually.
- ❑ Reconciliation and trust are a part of the building process of new relationships with God and others that can withstand the broken trust of the past by focusing on future relationships.
- ❑ The ability to restore trust in a relationship requires mutually trustworthy behavior from both parties which is instrumental in building healthy relationships

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation (cont.)

Connecting Reconciliation and Hope

- ❑ A three-stage model used in reconciliation-focused counseling addresses the problem the goals, and the strategies needed to cultivate a vision of hope.
 - 1) The problem - areas of alienation
 - 2) The goals - targets of reconciliation
 - 3) The strategies - a movement toward restoration and reconciliation
- ❑ Connecting the disconnected to God and others can be negatively impacted when the hope of reconciliation diminishes.
- ❑ Reconciliation will not heal all the relational scars left by a traumatic experience, but it can alleviate some of the guilt and anger associated with abusive type traumas which provides hope for building new healthy relationships.
- ❑ The process of reconciliation is where spiritual experiences and deep relationships meet at regret and grace.
- ❑ This allows one the ability to engage in a deep relationship and the openness to let oneself be touched by God or another person which often entails some regret and even remorse in the process.
- ❑ The deck of reconciliation relies on hope for support and strength.

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Segment One: The Deck of Reconciliation (cont.)

Connecting Reconciliation and Forgiveness

- ❑ Reconciliation and forgiveness are not synonymous but often coincide in the reconciliation process.
- ❑ Reconciliation is **rebuilding trust** that requires both parties to participate.
- ❑ Forgiveness does not rely on trust, the other parties' participation, or reaction.
- ❑ Reconciliation does not always necessitate forgiveness or restitution from the offender.
- ❑ Restoring trust is at the forefront of reconciliation and involves a different interpersonal process than forgiveness
- ❑ Spiritual reconciliation manifests emotionally and spiritually and often occurs simultaneously with God, another person, and oneself.
- ❑ Forgiveness and reconciliation are self-evident. Both require inner and outer qualities that proceed from a new perspective and hope.

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Session Eight: The Final Inspection

The Final Inspection Stage		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Building an Eph 4:7-16 Model	40 minutes
Part 1	Equipping each other model (Eph 4:12)	10 minutes
Part 2	Edifying the body of Christ model (Eph 4:12)	10 minutes
Part 3	Loving each other model (Eph 4:15-16)	10 minutes
Part 4	Fitly joined together model (Eph 4:16)	10 minutes
Two	Final Inspection	10 minutes
	Complete final inspection questionnaire	
Three	Reflection on Session Eight	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

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Segment One: The Final Inspection

Equipping Each Other Model

- ❑ Developing healthy relationships within FBC-GA will coincide with building a healthy church and the measuring stick or blueprint for gauging a healthy church is Ephesians 4:7-16.
- ❑ Paul uses the term “perfecting” of the saints to indicate that individual gifts were meant to equip believers for the ministry and edify the body of Christ and not the individual (Eph 4:12).
- ❑ The model church is a team effort to equip others in one accord similar to the first church in (Acts 2:1, 46).
- ❑ The team of builders is the church and the individuals in the church work in unison to build bridges of healthy relationships that help the disconnected connect with God and others.

*“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry,
for the edifying of the body of Christ”*

Eph 4:12

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Segment One: The Final Inspection

Edifying the Body of Christ Model

- ❑ A model church must obtain the standard of a church that is filled with Christ and seek conformity to Christ by every member which indicates that every member of the church body needs to have a growing relationship with Christ.
- ❑ One's gifts and authority are given for the edification of the church (body of believers) and not to destroy those individuals in the church (2 Cor 10:8).
- ❑ Everything done or said should edify the body of Christ (Eph 4:29).
- ❑ Grace, truth, and power are given in the form of gifts that are meant to edify the body of Christ which is the church.
- ❑ Believers use good speech to minister grace to the hearers as a form of edifying or building up (Eph 4:29)
- ❑ Paul instructs the church of Corinth that spiritual gifts were meant to edify the church and not individuals (1 Cor 14:12).

"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

1 Thes 5:11 (KJV)

55

Segment One: The Final Inspection

Loving Each Other Model

- ❑ Healthy relationships are built on love, unity, and maturity which are vital to the health of a church.
- ❑ Spiritual maturity is primarily relational and rooted in love as a reflection of the love and character of Christ.
- ❑ Loving each other is a love that is not envious, puffed up, boastful, and does not think of evil or rejoices in sin (1 Cor 13: 4-6).
- ❑ Love is the catalyst for bearing, believing, enduring, and hoping because godly love never fails (1 Cor 13:7-8).
- ❑ Paul challenges the congregation at Ephesus to "forbear" (e.g., hold up, endure, sustain, to bear) one another in love (Eph 4:2).
- ❑ Love is a spiritual command that **cannot** thrive in isolation from the body of believers.
- ❑ The church is designed to be a community for believers that encourages individual and corporate maturity through love and unity.

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Segment One: The Final Inspection

Fitly Jointed Together Model

- ❑ The phrase “the whole body fitly joined together” (Eph 4:16) illustrates the necessity of each stone being smoothed by the stone master to work together to form a building.
- ❑ This building is the church, and the stones are each member’s gifts being used to equip other members and edify Christ as the head of the church.
- ❑ The individuals of the church make up the whole body of the church and cannot be fitly joined together without healthy relationships.
- ❑ Paul envisions a healthy church of proportional growth that can only be obtained when the body of believers or the church utilizes the input of received gifts by all members of the body (Eph 4:1–16)
- ❑ The proper function of every member is crucial to a healthy and spiritually maturing church because relationships must be formed to equip the saints and edify or build up the body of Christ (v. 12).
- ❑ Paul charges the church to be likeminded, in one accord, of one mind (Phil 2:2), and one body (Rom 12:4– 5, 15:6, 1 Cor 12:12, 2 Cor 13:11, Phil 1:27, 2:2)

“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Phil 2:2

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Segment Three: The Final Inspection

The Final Inspection

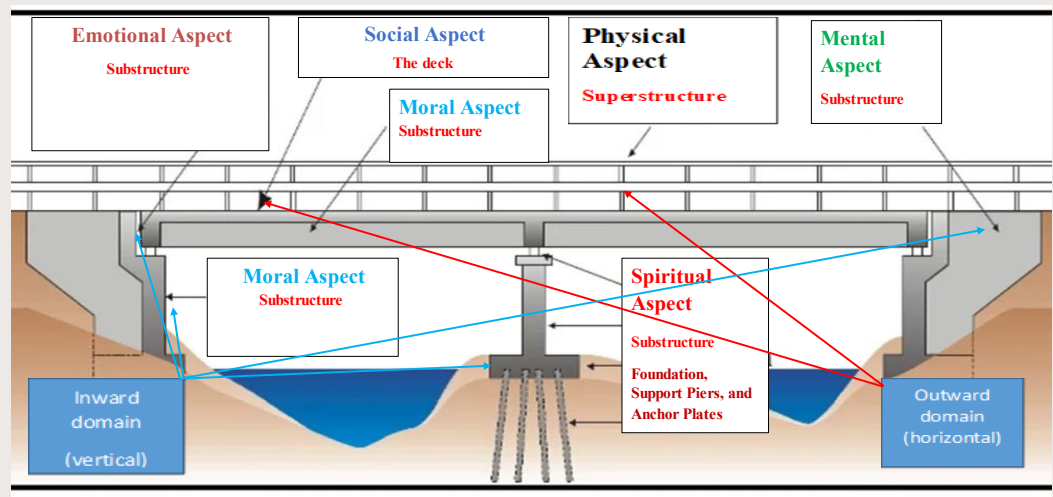
- ❑ Every Bridge has a final inspection that determines the quality of work and the completion of the bridge project.
- ❑ The final inspection provides information to determine the safety of the completed project. Likewise, a final inspection in building healthy relationships will determine the health of one’s relationship with God and others.
- ❑ The final inspection confirms the blueprint was accurately followed and no shortcuts were taken to complete the building process of bridges or relationships.
- ❑ The importance of regular inspections after the final inspection of the building process is a proactive measure to pinpoint minor issues, structural weaknesses, safety, and durability of each bridge.
- ❑ The same proactive measures go into building a healthy relationship with God and others.

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Session Nine: The Maintenance Stage

The Maintenance Stage		
Segment	Focus	Time limit
One	Human Development and Spiritual Formation	25 minutes
Part 1	Aspects of human development	10 minutes
Part 2	Intentional spiritual disciplines – A call to holiness	5 minutes
Part 3	Equipping self: Accountability, credibility, and spiritual maturing through healthy relationships	5 minutes
Part 4	Journaling: Learning to reflect on spiritual disciplines	5 minutes
Two	Community and Spiritual Formation	25 minutes
Part 1	Ongoing Discipleship: A follower of Christ	15 minutes
Part 2	Equipping Others: Accountability through community	5 minutes
Part 3	Journaling: Learning to record ongoing discipleship	5 minutes
Three	Reflection on Session Nine	10 minutes
	Journal reflection and open forum (voluntary)	

Six Aspects of the Human Person



Segment One: Human Development and Spiritual Formation: Part One

Aspects of Human Development

- ❑ Spiritual formation begins to develop the whole life of human development.
- ❑ The dimensions of human development and how they relate to spiritual formation are illustrated in the building bridges model (look at diagram), which is derived from Ted Ward's illustration of the human hand and the six dimensions of human development
- ❑ The spiritual aspect is the foundation on which the bridge of healthy relationships is built.
- ❑ The moral aspect of human development provides support to the spiritual aspect as part of the foundation and support piers.
- ❑ The emotional aspect of human development connects to the moral and mental aspects to form a solid support system for the inward domain of spiritual formation
- ❑ The bridge deck and the barrier represent the physical and social elements of relationships to express one's spiritual growth outwardly where spiritual disciplines can thrive. These two human aspects are the outward domain
- ❑ Once a bridge is constructed, each aspect becomes one cohesive unit that can be used for in the corporate domain.

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Segment One: Human Development and Spiritual Formation: Part One

Aspects of Human Development (cont.)

- ❑ The Christian journey is an act of spiritual formation that includes self-nurturing practice and relationships with others and becomes an intentional commitment to a lifetime of growth toward the wholeness of God.
- ❑ Spiritual formation involves being transformed or formed (Gal 4:19) inwardly which changes one's nature to be more Christlike in character and behavior.
- ❑ Wilhoit adds, "Spiritual formation is the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."
- ❑ This process includes both human and divine aspects of spiritual formation that focus on an intentional or deliberate process of being transformed into the image of Christ.
- ❑ Building and maintaining healthy relationships must also go through periodical inspections to ensure one's spiritual discipline and discipleship are still moving upward on the inspection scale.
- ❑ Bridge maintenance is essential in prolonging the lifespan and ensuring the reliability of a completed bridge.

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you"

Gal 4:19

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Segment One: Human Development and Spiritual Formation: Part Two

Intentional Spiritual Disciplines – A Call to Holiness

- ❑ The **inward domain** of spiritual disciplines (i.e., prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, fasting, and silence) is focused on the development and transformation of the inwardness of each participant of the workshop.
- ❑ The **outward domain** of spiritual disciplines is focused on building bridges from a social and behavioral aspect that allows participants to corporately practice their healthy relationships with others (i.e., worship, spiritual direction, and celebration).
- ❑ Spiritual disciplines need to develop a rule of life that centers around loving Christ above all else.
- ❑ Spiritual formation is the foundation of Human development just as love is the foundation for building relationships.
- ❑ The maintenance stage requires a repetition of actions that achieves a high standard of performance through intentional and ongoing practices called spiritual disciplines.

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Segment One: Human Development and Spiritual Formation: Part Two

Intentional Spiritual Disciplines – A Call to Holiness (cont.)

- ❑ Spiritual disciplines allow believers to imitate Christ in godly actions and behavior (Eph 2:10) to be transformed into godly disciples by using cognitive (i.e., meditation, prayer, discernment, etc.) and behavioral disciplines (fasting, chastity, body care, etc.).
- ❑ The combination of spiritual disciplines and healthy relationships provides sound counsel (Prov 27:9), sharpens one's moral character (Prov 27:17), and demonstrates loyalty (Prov 17:17) and trust (Ps 41:9).
- ❑ Intentional spiritual disciplines are fundamentally essential for spiritual maturity.
- ❑ Maturity is necessary for maintaining healthy relationships, but disconnection can delay, disrupt, or even halt maturity.
- ❑ If the mind is preoccupied, deceived, or damaged by strongholds, then God's truths are not perceivable without intentional spiritual disciplines.

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,
which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

Eph 2:10

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SEGMENT ONE: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION: PART THREE

Equipping Self: Accountability and Credibility Through Healthy Relationships

- ❑ Relationship with spiritual disciplines enables believers to build accountability, credibility, and spiritual maturity.
- ❑ One's spiritual disciplines are not intended to be spiritual exercises that express duty or performance, but spiritual exercises that are a privilege to be used (1 Tim 4:7–8).
- ❑ The goal of spiritual disciplines is holiness, righteousness, and selfcontrol as a new man with a renewed knowledge that allows individuals to put off anger and wrath and put on kindness and humility (Col:8–14).
- ❑ The corporate domain (i.e., community and worship) provides an opportunity for growth and accountability through participation and practice.

*“But refuse profane and old wives fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.
For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things,
having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”*

1 Tim 4:7–8

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Segment One: Human Development and Spiritual Formation: Part Four

Journaling: Learning to Reflect on Spiritual Disciplines

- ❑ Journaling is a daily diary for your spiritual life.
- ❑ The pursuit of spiritual discipline is a process of maturity and not an event. Therefore, journaling is a great tool to monitor the progress of one's process of maturity in spiritual disciplines.
- ❑ Journaling needs to be an honest reflection that can be used to motivate individuals to intentionally practice spiritual disciplines.
- ❑ Journaling can be used to reflect on Scripture passages, meditation, prayers, and daily inspection.
- ❑ Journaling can be used as a source of selfaccountability in the progress of spiritual growth or formation through spiritual disciplines.

*“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight,
O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”*

Ps 19:14

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Segment two: Community and Spiritual Formation Part One

Ongoing Discipleship: A Follower of Christ

- ❑ Discipleship is an important maintenance measure in maintaining healthy relationships.
- ❑ Ongoing discipleship is about relationships and is a great indicator that a church is a healthy church.
- ❑ Relationships and ongoing discipleship must coincide with one another.
- ❑ Discipleship is about association and connections and has never been biblically envisioned as a solo act or for isolated Christians. A church cannot remain healthy without ongoing discipleship
- ❑ Community means the individuals in the church that make up the body of Christ or the body of believers work in unity to share the gospel by edifying Christ as a follower of Christ.
- ❑ Discipleship is not just for pastors and deacons. All believers are instructed to be followers (disciples) of Christ. This means all Christians should have an intentional ongoing discipleship plan in place.
- ❑ Disciple-making is equipping other church members to work together as a team to form a discipleshipmaking community because every Christian should be a disciplemaker.
- ❑ Discipleship helps develop a culture of accountability through community. J.T. English notes, “Community is not discipleship, but discipleship cannot happen without community.”

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Segment Two: Community and Spiritual Formation Part Two

Equipping Others: Accountability Through Community

- ❑ The relational life investment in discipleship focuses on transformation and multiplication
- ❑ Ongoing discipleship thrives on honest accountability through relationships (i.e., small groups, accountability partners, or community).
- ❑ God has given everyone the capacity for connectedness but a life that brings joy, lifechanging, and meaningful relationships will only flourish in healthy relationships that begin within the community.
- ❑ Fellowship within a community of believers is something all Christians cannot live without because God uses people to form people.
- ❑ Group accountability develops one’s credibility and promotes the freedom and responsibility to be a disciple of Christ which leads to healthy relationships and healthy churches.
- ❑ Every ministry of the church should lead to discipleship by intentionally shifting to a type of biblical relational discipleship that funnels people toward a discipleship environment through relational small groups.
- ❑ The shift from activity to relationship will allow each ministry to align with the overall goal of making disciples not as competitors or in isolation but as a harmonious group of believers with the primary mission of discipleship.

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Segment two: Community and Spiritual Formation Part Three

Journaling: Learning to Record Ongoing Discipleship

- ❑ Journaling is a great tool for spiritual recordkeeping (i.e., conversions, prayers for the unsaved, mission work, volunteering, and evangelism efforts).
- ❑ Journaling provides self-accountability in ongoing discipleship.
- ❑ Journaling provides an inspection report for one's ongoing discipleship and one's ability to die daily to self and the flesh.
- ❑ Paul states, "I die daily" (1 Cor 15:31).
- ❑ Journaling allows one to determine if our ongoing discipleship is "worthy" to be followed by others (1 Cor 4:15-16, Eph 4:1, 1 Thes 2:12). Worthy means fruitful and Christlike not prideful or self-warranted.
- ❑ Recording ongoing discipleship provides a maintenance (relationship) log to become a spiritually healthy person and a spiritually healthy church. Bridges and relationships must have a maintenance plan.

*"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work,
and increasing in the knowledge of God."*

Col 1:10

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BRIDGE APPROVED FOR RELATIONSHIPS



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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 27, 2023

Jonathan Terry
Kenneth Warren

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-455 Building Bridges: Connecting the Disconnected to God and Others

Dear Jonathan Terry and Kenneth Warren,

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 that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because

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

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

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

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

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office