

A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences and Psychological Well-Being Among
African-American Christian Evangelicals: The Role and Impact of Prayer

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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Abstract

This descriptive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and psychological well-being of African-American Christian evangelicals, with a particular focus on how prayer influenced their psychological well-being. Building on the African-American community's longstanding tradition of religious participation and interaction, the study predominantly took place within urban African-American Christian evangelical communities in northwest Roanoke, Virginia. Cognitive theory, religious coping theory, and social support theory provided the theoretical framework for understanding the role and impact of prayer among African-American Christian evangelicals. Data collection involved surveys and interviews with 10 participants. Inductive coding techniques were used to identify themes, patterns, and categories within the data. The findings highlighted the significant impact of prayer on psychological well-being, demonstrating how prayer practices contribute to personal growth, emotional support, and community engagement. This study offered practical implications for mental health providers, emphasizing the importance of integrating religious and spiritual practices into therapeutic approaches for diverse populations.

Keywords: Prayer, psychological well-being, African American, Christian evangelicals

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this study to my two daughters, Mykayla and Myla Lundy. Thank you for allowing me to fulfill the most important role in life: being your dad. This study serves as a reminder that, with God by your side, you can achieve the impossible, regardless of your race, gender, or socioeconomic background. I have prayed to see you both succeed in life. I also dedicate this study to God, who had a plan for me to complete this doctorate since before I was born. To all the participants of this study, I hope this study offered valuable insights into the impact of prayer on psychological well-being.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge God for always being by my side during this study. As Philippians 1:6 stated, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." He indeed carried me through to the completion of this program.

My deepest gratitude goes to my Chair, Dr. Edgar, for his prayers, mentorship, and guidance from the beginning to the completion of this study.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Prayer has been one of the most common practices used across different cultures and religions around the world. Prayer has often been described as communicating with a higher power or a deity. People pray to express gratitude, seek guidance, and foster their connection with God. In times of adversity or challenges, prayer may be used as a coping strategy to seek strength and comfort in God. There has been extensive scholarly research on the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being. Prayer has been found to be an effective coping skill to help individuals in stressful situations. Furthermore, prayer has been correlated with reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. It also provides individuals with a sense of comfort, hope, and purpose. Prayer in a group can be very beneficial for strengthening social connections. However, some studies have shown that prayer can lead individuals to experience guilt, stress, or fear in a certain religious context, which causes certain people to doubt the efficacy of prayer in reducing mental health symptoms. There have been limited studies on the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals. Thus, this study investigated the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly focusing on how prayer influenced their psychological well-being. Chapter One introduces the background, situation, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions of key terms. It concludes with a summary.

Background

The effect of prayer on psychological well-being has been highly researched in the literature. Several studies have shown that prayer plays an important role as a coping mechanism

in helping individuals maintain and improve their mental health (Koenig, 2012; Park, 2013). Prayer has often been used to deal with life challenges and foster resiliency, growth, and strength (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Despite the significant body of literature on the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being, there has been a notable research gap that targets the African-American community, which has strong religious traditions and spirituality.

Throughout history, African Americans have relied on prayer and religious institutions to seek social, emotional, and spiritual support (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). They have used prayer as their coping strategy to deal with life challenges and difficulties, both individual and collective (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). This spiritual practice has played a crucial role in the fight against racial discrimination and social inequality. In fact, prayer has catalyzed social change among African Americans (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). Although studies have shown the positive effect of prayer on psychological well-being, a dearth of studies has highlighted how prayer influences psychological well-being among African Americans. The cause of this gap in the literature has occurred because African Americans often mix with other racial groups and ethnicities to demonstrate the influence of prayer on psychological well-being.

Addressing this research gap was important, due to the overwhelming rates of mental health issues in the African-American community. Studies have shown that African Americans experience higher rates of mental health symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, compared to other ethnic groups (Williams et al., 2003). African Americans have been less likely to seek mental health services, due to stigma and systemic racism in the healthcare system. These obstacles have reinforced the need to explore the importance of prayer in fostering psychological well-being among African Americans.

The African-American community has placed great importance on prayer to deal with psychological distress. Thus, it was essential to investigate the connection between prayer and psychological well-being among African Americans. This study examined the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being and explored the nuances of the relationship. It also considered different prayer types, such as thanksgiving, repentance, confession, supplication, and intercessory. Throughout this research, the researcher understood how prayer could promote psychological well-being within the African-American community.

Situation to Self

As a theologian and mental health therapist, I developed a deep interest in the relationship between religious practices and psychological well-being. I have often used prayer as a coping strategy to navigate life challenges and deal with stressors. In my family, prayer is more than a ritual; it is where we find strength, courage, and resilience while communicating with the divine. Prayer has also influenced my professional life as a therapist. Before my therapy sessions, I spend some time in prayer, asking God to give me wisdom and understanding to help my clients with their psychological issues.

In my therapeutic practice, my religious clients have often used prayer as a coping mechanism to manage their depression, anxiety, and life stressors. Their narrative about the effectiveness of prayer on their psychological well-being has piqued my curiosity and professional interest. My clients' experience with the effectiveness of prayer on their psychological well-being raised my interest as a Black person living in a predominantly Black neighborhood and wanting to know how prayer has impacted the lives of African-American Christian evangelicals in my community. In sum, my interest in this topic was based on my personal, professional, and communal experiences.

Problem Statement

There has been a growing body of research on the impact of prayer on psychological well-being. Previous studies in the literature have examined the effect of prayer on psychological well-being. These studies have shown that prayer can be an effective coping mechanism to help people manage a wide range of psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and fear (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018; Ellison et al., 2014). Philippians 4:6 said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

The Bible encouraged people to turn to God in prayer in difficult times. Christian believers have addressed God in different types of prayers, such as supplication, thanksgiving, confession, worship, and intercession. Christians often spend ample time with God in prayer because they believe that people need to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:18). Some have argued that it does not matter how often you pray; what matters most is what you pray about. Others have said that people need to spend considerable time with God in prayer to manage their psychological issues. A study by Bradshaw et al. (2008) found that when people's prayers are not answered, they often feel depressed, anxious, and stressed.

There have been some studies about the impact of prayer among Muslims, but the researcher could not find any research that specifically targeted the African-American population. African Americans have used prayer as a way to cope with their psychological well-being. A study reported that almost all Black Americans (97%) believe in God or a higher power and that God can change world events and people's lives. The survey also showed that 78% of Black Americans believed that prayer can heal physical illness and injury. Thus, there was a gap in the literature regarding how often African Americans pray and the types of prayer they engage

in concerning their psychological well-being (Mohamed et al., 2021). Due to the fact that prayer has been vital among African American communities, it was very worthwhile to know the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being.

The current research brought new insight into the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being among African Americans. As a result of this study, African Americans can spend meaningful time with their higher power in prayer. This study also addressed another gap in integrating prayer as a therapeutic intervention when providing services to African Americans. The study utilized the African-American evangelical Christian church population.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly focusing on how prayer influences their psychological well-being. The African-American community has had a longstanding tradition of religious participation and interaction. However, the role and impact of prayer on psychological well-being has been a multifaceted and intricate association that has not been thoroughly examined among African-American Christian evangelicals.

This research aimed to explore the complexities involved in the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being to elucidate the underlying mechanisms. The present study also aimed to gain a more profound understanding of the psychological dimensions of religious practices among African-American Christian evangelicals by exploring the role and impact of prayer in their lived experiences. Moreover, this study examined the perceived belief that prayer could be used as a protective factor against psychological distress to promote overall well-being.

The results of this research not only contributed to the current knowledge base regarding the relationship between religion, spirituality, and mental health among African-American adults;

it also provided actionable insights for faith-based interventions to enhance psychological well-being and resilience within this population. The research was situated to guide mental health professionals, including psychologists, counselors, and religious figures, who operate within the African-American population.

Significance of the Study

The current study on the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly focusing on how prayer influences their psychological well-being, held tremendous significance. The African-American community has been consistently shown to place significant importance on religious faith (Taylor et al., 2004). However, there has been a notable lack of comprehensive studies examining the influence of spiritual practices, including prayer, on mental health. Thus, the present investigation addressed a significant void in the existing body of literature and held promise for guiding mental health and spiritual counseling interventions in the said community.

This study on the phenomenological approach to the lived experience of the African-American Christian evangelical community made a unique contribution to the scholarly literature. There have been a lot of studies in the literature about the role and impact of prayer on psychological well-being, but there has been little research that has explored in-depth the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly about prayer on psychological well-being. By focusing on this unique demographic, the study provided vital insight into how culture can shape prayer practices and experiences. Second, this study used an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the role of prayer on psychological well-being within the African-American Christian evangelical community. The study also provided practical implications for mental health providers working with diverse populations.

The study's emphasis on the African-American population held significance. Previous studies conducted in mental health and spirituality have frequently encountered a deficiency in the participation of racial and ethnic minorities (Whaley & Davis, 2007), constraining outcomes' applicability. The present research centered on African-American adults and enhanced a more comprehensive understanding of the connections between spirituality and psychological well-being. These insights contributed to culturally sensitive mental health interventions and policymaking, promoting a more profound understanding of the distinctive spiritual practices that have been prevalent within the African-American community.

Research Questions

Research Question One

How do African-American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being?

Research Question Two

In what ways do African-American Christian evangelicals perceive prayer as impacting their coping mechanisms during times of stress or adversity?

Research Question Three

How do cultural and religious beliefs within the African-American Christian evangelical community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological wellness?

Definitions

1. *Adoration Prayer* - The way of worshiping God for who He is and what He has done in our lives (Laird et al., 2004).
2. *Colloquial Prayer* - A way of expressing your feelings to God, like talking with a friend to ask for help and guidance (Paine & Sandage, 2023).

3. *Confession Prayer* - The act of admitting our wrongdoing before God and seeking God's forgiveness (Laird et al., 2004).
4. *Obligation Prayer* - A type of prayer often motivated by a sense of duty or religious adherence.
5. *Petitionary Prayer* - Asking God for help, guidance, and support on behalf of oneself or others (Laird et al., 2004).
6. *Psychological Well-Being* - A condition that embodies positive aspects of an individual's life, such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, mastery of the environment, autonomy, and positive relationships with others (Ryff, 2014).
7. *Thanksgiving Prayer* - The act of acknowledging who God is in our lives by expressing our gratitude toward Him for His goodness and blessings (Ladd & Spilka, 2013).

Summary

Chapter One articulated the research investigation on the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly focusing on how prayer influenced their psychological well-being. This chapter addressed the problem statement, research questions, and study's significance. The background of the problem highlighted the importance of spiritual practices in the African-American community, such as prayer, to cope with everyday life stressors. The study provided insight into the importance of examining the connections between prayer and psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals. The outcome of this study contributed to a greater understanding of spirituality and mental health to healthcare providers, aiding in developing culturally sensitive interventions when working with African Americans. The chapter concluded with the study's research questions and operational definitions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The current research study investigated the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly focusing on how prayer influences their psychological well-being. The researcher surveyed the impact of prayer on psychological well-being, the positive impact of prayer on patients with physical health issues, and the relationship between prayer types and psychological well-being. The researcher relied on scholarly articles to better understand the concepts of prayer and psychological well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Prayer was essential in this study, as it related to psychological well-being. Prayer, in simple terms, is talking to God. Prayer facilitates the connection between humans and the divine (Isacco & Wade, 2019). There is no limitation on what someone can and cannot pray. Apostle Paul wrote:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6–7)

People often pray when they are going through a stressful time, such as the death of loved ones, relationship difficulties, health issues, and financial problems.

Cognitive Theory

The cognitive-behavior framework model emphasized that thoughts, behaviors, emotions, physiological responses, and the environment are interrelated. This framework provided an understanding of human lives' meaning and their role within the world. James and Wells (2003) put forth two important mechanisms that underpin the relationship between religiousness and

mental health: mental health offers guidance on evaluating life events, and religious practices support self-regulation. They suggested that meditative prayer may help people become less self-absorbed, more mentally receptive to stress, and less prone to worry and ruminate (James & Wells, 2003). This framework was related to the current study since the focus was on the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being.

Social Support Theory

Social support theory focused on the idea of having strong bonds with other people, which can be very beneficial for physical and mental health. This theory also highlighted the need to provide practical assistance and emotional support during challenging times. Studies have shown a strong relationship between social support and overall well-being. People who have a strong support network have often reported having better physical and mental health than those who lack it (Uchino, 2006). Another study found that people with more social contacts lived longer than those with fewer (James et al., 1988). Thus, having healthy relationships with others is crucial to living a long and happy life, according to the social support theory.

Social support has been associated with better health and a reduced risk of illness, as well as reduced levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. One study demonstrated that social support has been linked with lower stress, sadness, and anxiety levels, as well as an improved immune system and general health. Social support has also been demonstrated to mitigate the detrimental impacts of stress on health outcomes (Thoits, 2011). According to a meta-analysis, researchers have found that feelings of loneliness and isolation are linked to an increased risk of mortality, suggesting that social support plays a pivotal role in promoting positive health outcomes. Hence, having a strong support network is crucial for health and happiness (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Promoting healthy behaviors has been one way that social support may have an impact on health. According to research, social support can increase self-efficacy and motivation for health-related activities, like exercising, quitting smoking, and adhering to medications (Berkman & Glass, 2000). However, if social support is viewed as unsupportive or controlling, it may have adverse impacts (Lakey & Cronin, 2008). Hence, it was crucial to consider both the benefits and drawbacks of social support in order to comprehend how it affects health outcomes.

Religious Coping Theory

Religious coping is using religious beliefs, attitudes, or practices to manage stress or adversity (Pargament et al., 2000). Extensive empirical research has been undertaken, indicating that religious coping significantly fosters overall well-being. Religious coping mechanisms significantly impact individuals' psychological well-being, particularly in situations characterized by stress or illness.

According to cognitive resource theory, religion can offer individuals coping resources to manage and resolve stress (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). The available resources have encompassed belief systems that facilitate the comprehension of existence, relationships that provide social assistance, and rituals that have the potential to alleviate anxiety. The utilization of positive religious coping, which has involved deriving meaning, seeking comfort, pursuing intimacy with a higher power, and fostering a sense of spiritual connectedness with others, has had beneficial impacts on psychological adjustment (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005).

On the other hand, it has been observed that negative religious coping strategies, encompassing religious struggles, punitive religious reassessment, or spiritual disconnection, have been associated with adverse mental health outcomes (Pargament et al., 1998). The nature of the religious coping mechanisms that people use has a big impact on their psychological well-

being. This has emphasized the crucial role that religious coping skills and their application play in successfully managing stress.

Numerous studies have demonstrated a noteworthy association between religious coping and the overall well-being of individuals afflicted with chronic illnesses (Park et al., 2018). Research has shown that individuals diagnosed with cancer who employed religious coping mechanisms exhibited elevated levels of well-being in comparison to those who did not engage in such strategies (Park et al.). This finding implied that religious coping may offer individuals a sense of significance, direction, and consistency amidst the experience of illness. However, the influence of religious coping on individuals' well-being exhibited variability when examined within diverse populations and contexts (Park et al., 2018).

The impact of stress can differ, depending on various factors, such as individual variations, cultural influences, and the characteristics of the stress-inducing situations (Hood et al., 2009). An empirical investigation revealed that individuals of African-American descent have exhibited a higher propensity to employ religious coping mechanisms and reported experiencing more substantial advantages in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts (Hayward & Krause, 2014). This finding implied the existence of cultural disparities in the efficacy and consequences of religious coping strategies.

In conclusion, religious coping exerts a substantial impact on the overall state of well-being. The employment of positive religious coping strategies, such as the active pursuit of spiritual support, the extraction of meaning from religious beliefs, or the cultivation of a sense of interconnectedness with fellow individuals, has been linked to improved mental health results.

Related Literature

Prayer

Prayer has been essential to many religions and has been used as a way to connect with God or a higher power (Hodge, 2007). The function of prayer in human existence has been practiced in different ways, from silent meditation to vocal invocations. Although many people have turned to prayer when feeling down, others have used it to communicate with God or offer thanks. Prayer's multifaceted nature has reflected the complexity of spirituality (Pargament, 2011).

The significance of prayer as a ritual has extended far beyond the confines of any one religion and has affected many areas of the human experience. Pargament (1997) argued that prayer is an essential coping method because it provides a spiritual outlet for one's most private thoughts and feelings. It is a spiritual wellspring that may fortify the mind and spirit to face anything in life, from the everyday to the catastrophic (Ellison et al., 2012).

How people pray has an impact on both their individual and communal identities. Praying can significantly impact one's worldview by reinforcing religious ideas (Park, 2007). Additionally, the congregational part of prayer can help individuals develop a strong sense of belonging. It is a shared spiritual experience that can strengthen ties between people and communities (Krause & Hayward, 2014).

Colloquial Prayer

Colloquial prayer has referred to a prayer practice characterized by the utilization of ordinary language and conversational style to establish communication with a divine or spiritual entity. The aforementioned observation has pertained to a prayer style characterized by a subjective and casual demeanor, wherein individuals employ colloquial language, phrases, and

idiomatic expressions, deviating from the conventional and regimented formats of prayer (Smith & Denton, 2022). The concept has revolved around the absence of disrespect or informality and centers on cultivating a more profound connection and rapport with the divine through individual and genuine dialogues.

Recent studies have indicated an upward trend in the utilization of colloquial prayer, with a particular emphasis on its prevalence among younger age groups. According to Johnson (2023), scholars have posited that this transition can be attributed to a heightened inclination towards authenticity and interpersonal engagement within religious and spiritual observances. These individuals frequently hold the belief that God or a higher power serves as a companion or personal mentor who comprehends and reacts to their daily challenges and triumphs. Consequently, they employ a more informal and colloquial tone in their prayers.

The effectiveness and influence of informal prayer have been extensively discussed among scholars. According to Pargament and Lomax (2021), there has been contention among researchers regarding the notion that informal prayer fosters a heightened and more intimate connection between individuals and their perceived transcendent entity, thereby enhancing the efficacy of the prayer. On the other hand, some researchers think that the casual and unstructured nature of everyday prayer might make it less holy and important, which could make it less spiritually effective (Turner, 2022).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the ongoing discussions, it was crucial to comprehend that the influence and effectiveness of prayer, whether informal or otherwise, can vary significantly, depending on individual perspectives. The efficacy of prayer has resided in its capacity to offer solace, optimism, and a feeling of interconnectedness—factors that can exhibit significant variation, contingent upon an individual's particular convictions, encounters, and circumstances

(Baker, 2003). Hence, the efficacy attributed to informal prayer has been contingent upon an individual's subjective religious beliefs and their interpretation of the divine.

In summary, colloquial prayer has embodied a fluid and progressive facet of religious and spiritual customs. The increasing prevalence of this phenomenon has highlighted the changing requirements and aspirations of individuals in their quest for spiritual connectivity and manifestation. The effectiveness of prayer has remained a topic of ongoing scholarly discourse. However, due to its personal and subjective nature, the significance and influence of informal prayer have been expected to remain contingent upon the individual who engages in it (Sands, 2023).

Thanksgiving Prayer

The act of offering a thanksgiving prayer has often involved the expression of gratitude, humility, and recognition of the plentiful blessings present in one's life. According to Park (2022), this phenomenon has changed, becoming a time of reflection and acknowledgment of the positive aspects of people's lives. Moreover, it has often involved social interaction, as individuals gather with their family and acquaintances to express their appreciation and unity.

Offering thanksgiving prayers can improve a person's general well-being and level of happiness (Sutton, 2022). The viewpoint expressed has aligned with the broader field of positive psychology, which argued that intentional displays of gratitude can have long-lasting positive impacts on individual well-being and psychological state (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2022). However, it was imperative to recognize that there was no unanimous consensus on the positive reception of the thanksgiving prayer. According to Martinez (2023), some critics have contended that this particular tradition may unintentionally perpetuate a sense of entitlement or privilege while ignoring the challenging circumstances that the population faces. This critique argued for

an increased emphasis on mindfulness and a more comprehensive understanding of global issues in gratitude practice.

Notwithstanding the criticisms mentioned, it was irrefutable that the thanksgiving prayer can cultivate a feeling of interconnectedness among individuals and the virtue of gratitude (Anderson & Cook, 2023). This activity has promoted briefly pausing, engaging in self-reflection, and recognizing many experiences and opportunities within progressively busy and fast-paced lives. As societal advancements continue, it will be crucial to consider the ongoing evolution of this practice with the aim of addressing its critiques and effectively preserving its manifold benefits.

Adoration Prayer

The act of engaging in adoration prayer has been widely regarded as a sacred occasion, during which individuals express reverence and exaltation towards the divine entity, as noted by Pargament (2021). Christians have employed this particular mode of prayer to acknowledge the immense magnitude of God, articulate their profound affection for Him, and pursue spiritual illumination. In Hinduism, expressing devotion and surrender to a specific deity has been commonly achieved through adoration prayers, also known as "Bhakti" (Miller, 2023). Within the Islamic faith, the practice of "Dua" has served as a means to convey profound reverence towards Allah while concurrently seeking divine aid or expressing gratitude.

The psychological impact of adoration prayer on an individual's mental and emotional well-being has been extensively recognized. According to recent research, evidence has suggested that individuals who engage in adoration prayer regularly experience a reduction in stress and anxiety levels, an improvement in their ability to cope with challenges, and an overall enhancement in their general well-being (Koenig et al., 2022). Scholars have contended that this

particular style of prayer facilitates cultivating a favorable cognitive state, thereby enhancing individuals' perception of their life's purpose and significance.

Notably, the impact of adoration prayer has extended beyond individual spiritual development and has implications for interpersonal connections. According to Davis et al. (2022), adoration prayer can promote relational harmony and social cohesion by cultivating humility, empathy, and compassion. Adoration prayer's profound impact has extended to individual and communal spheres, exemplifying its transformative potential.

Adoration prayer has been found to be a powerful means of facilitating spiritual transformation and fostering individual development. This phenomenon has promoted the cultivation of humility, the manifestation of profound reverence, and the cultivation of intimate connections with the divine. Moreover, it has fostered a constructive mindset and positively influenced interpersonal relationships. The prevalence of this practice among various religious traditions has served as evidence of its importance in the spiritual development of individuals.

Confession Prayer

Confession has been deeply rooted in biblical teachings, particularly in the New Testament. According to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (*New International Version [NIV]*). In this context, confession prayers have been seen as a pathway to spiritual atonement and reconnection with the divine, marking them as integral practices within Christian worship (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001).

Confession prayer has had a profound psychological process involving self-awareness, acceptance, and a desire for transformation. According to Bandura (1986), individuals can recognize their actions' moral implications through self-reflection, thereby fostering a sense of

responsibility and guilt. When articulated through confession prayers, these emotions can instigate a deep process of repentance and moral rectification. Indeed, confession prayer can be seen as an actualization of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, demonstrating the complex interplay between personal factors, behavior, and the environment in shaping human morality.

In a confession prayer, the believer demonstrates vulnerability and humility, acknowledging the wrongfulness of their actions and their reliance on divine mercy. The confession is not a mere admission but a transformative experience: "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted" (*NIV*, 2 Cor. 7:10). This principle aligned with research that highlighted the powerful role of guilt and empathy in prompting moral behavior and personal change (Tangney et al., 2007).

Confession prayers have also played a role in community building and cohesion. Confessions, particularly in a communal setting, such as a church, can create a sense of shared morality and ethical consensus (Whittington & Scher, 2010). It has fostered an environment of mutual understanding, empathy, and support, strengthening social ties. Through communal confession, individuals have found solace in the shared human experience of fallibility and the collective pursuit of redemption.

Petitionary Prayer

Petitionary prayer has referred to the religious custom of presenting requests or supplications to a divine entity, typically to fulfill personal or collective needs (Ladd & Spilka, 2013). Petitionary prayer, frequently observed within diverse religious traditions, has symbolized an inherent human inclination to seek aid or intervention in times of adversity. Within Christianity, Jesus imparted teachings to His disciples, including the Lord's Prayer, which encompassed elements of petition (*New Revised Standard Version*, Matt. 6:9–13).

Petitionary prayer has been found to have substantial psychological effects on individuals' mental well-being. Pargament (2011) posited that engaging in this particular form of prayer has the potential to mitigate stress, anxiety, and depression, thereby fostering a state of tranquility and solace. Furthermore, petitionary prayer has been positively correlated with improved health outcomes and increased longevity, suggesting a strong mind-body connection (Levin, 2016). Scholars have hypothesized that the act of petitionary prayer can play a role in an individual's coping strategies, potentially bolstering their resilience in the face of adversity.

Nevertheless, there has been a divergence of theological viewpoints regarding petitionary prayer. Some have contended that the act of prayer can be interpreted as suggesting a potentially flexible connection with a deity, typically understood as immutable (Cuneo, 2006). According to Keller (2017), proponents have argued that petitionary prayer enables individuals to actively engage in God's continuous process of creation, thereby suggesting a dynamic relationship. Theological perspectives have encompassed a range of viewpoints that vary in their understanding of the interaction between the divine and human realms, ranging from static to dynamic interpretations.

The scientific examination of petitionary prayer, particularly its effects on health, has garnered considerable interest. Several studies have indicated the presence of positive correlations, although establishing causality has remained challenging (Benson et al., 2006). Critics have expressed skepticism regarding the methodology employed in these studies, raising concerns, such as the potential influence of the placebo effect. Furthermore, they have contended that the empirical verification of spiritual phenomena is exceedingly challenging (Harris et al., 2006).

Obligation Prayer

The obligatory prayer, commonly known as Salah in Islamic theology, has been regarded as one of the fundamental tenets of Islam, forming part of the Five Pillars of the faith. The religious practice in question, which is obligatory for all mentally and physically capable adult Muslims, has fostered spiritual development and a collective sense of unity among adherents of the Islamic faith (Ozalp, 2020). According to the Qur'an, Salah is mandated to be observed five times daily, at designated intervals, incorporating various rituals, such as ablution, recitation of sacred verses, and specific physical positions, such as standing, bowing, and prostrating (Bukhari, 1989).

The obligatory prayer has been performed to exemplify the faith's inherent rhythm and spiritual cadence. Muslims are obligated to engage in prayer at specific times throughout the day, namely, before sunrise (Fajr), at midday (Dhuhr), in the afternoon (Asr), immediately after sunset (Maghrib), and during the evening (Isha; Rahman, 2019). Muslims have developed discipline and mindfulness in their daily lives by following this schedule, aligning their actions with the world's natural rhythms and strengthening their bond with Allah (Ghazanfar, 2022).

The practice of obligatory prayer has carried social implications, as it promotes the development of communal bonds and cultivates a collective sense of identity. Engaging in collective prayer at the mosque, particularly during significant occasions, such as Friday prayer (Jummah), Eid, and Ramadan, has strengthened social cohesion by cultivating an atmosphere of mutual assistance and shared identity (Haq, 2021). The embodiment of communal prayer in the Ummah, which refers to the global community of Muslims, has underscored the principles of unity and equality among its diverse members, irrespective of their socioeconomic or ethnic origins (Rabbani, 2021).

Finally, the obligatory prayer has served as a moral compass, providing guidance to adherents in their pursuit of virtuous conduct while deterring them from engaging in immoral behaviors. According to the scriptural text of the Qur'an (29:45), it has been advised to recite the contents of the revealed book and diligently engage in prayer. Prayer has been observed to serve as a deterrent against immoral behavior and acts of wrongdoing.

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer has played an essential role in many people's spiritual lives. Prayer has allowed them to build a strong relationship with their higher self, asking for guidance and finding peace, strength, and direction in difficult times. Prayer has also had the potential to foster relationships with one another through communal prayer. Prayer has not only been a communication tool to talk with the divine; it is also the breath of the soul (Chittister, 2007).

Prayer has been essential in helping individuals stay close to God. It has facilitated communication between humans and the divine. It has allowed people to go on a journey inward, where they can think and talk about the meaning of life and their spiritual views (Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Such spiritual activity has aided in developing a more profound relationship with God and oneself (Hall et al., 2009). From a psychological perspective, prayer has served as a means of self-examination and catharsis. Prayer has been shown to improve mental health, since it allows people to express their deepest thoughts and feelings (Whittington & Scher, 2010). In times of stress, it can be a source of comfort and strength (Smith et al., 2007).

It was also worth noting the societal impact of prayer. Praying together regularly, as done in congregations, has been shown to strengthen feelings of community and belonging (Krause, 2008). In addition to reducing feelings of isolation, community involvement has been shown to

strengthen social cohesiveness and solidarity—two key components of prosperous communities (Lim & Putnam, 2010).

Finally, has research suggested that prayer can play a significant role in shaping one's character. It has prompted people to examine their behavior, motives, and ethical attitude (Shariff et al., 2016), fostering personal development and moral fortitude. Prayer has improved the quality of life for individuals and communities by encouraging the development of admirable traits, like modesty, forgiveness, and compassion.

Prayer and Image of God

The theological notion of human beings being created in the image of God, commonly referred to as *imago Dei*, has significantly influenced the comprehension of prayer. Prayer has transcended mere ritualistic or obligatory practices, as it has encompassed a profound and interactive engagement between the human and the divine. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the profound nature of prayer, it was imperative to comprehend the inherent connection between the *imago Dei* and prayer—a connection that has been distinctly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The concept of humans being created in the image of God has held significant historical and theological significance within the biblical narrative. The Genesis creation story clarified the idea that God created humanity in His image. It stated, "So God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them" (*NIV*, Gen. 1:27). This declaration served to acknowledge not only the intrinsic significance and merit of the human species but also signified a distinct connection between the entity responsible for creation and the created. The concept of humanity being created in the image of God has also implied an inherent ability to engage in a spiritual connection with the divine. Within this particular

framework, prayer has not solely been regarded as a religious practice but rather as a recognition and perpetuation of the inherent connection to the divine.

In light of humanity's distinct role and identity as carriers of the divine image, prayer can be understood as a dialogic interaction that serves to reaffirm this identity. According to Brueggemann (2002), prayer has served as a means through which individuals encounter God's attentiveness and responsiveness, thereby emphasizing their inherent worth and dignity. In the act of engaging in prayers of lament, thanksgiving, or supplication, individuals establish a connection with the divine with the intention of seeking guidance, solace, or affirmation.

The New Testament provided an extensive number of valuable insights regarding the practice of prayer. The passage found in Matthew 6:9–13 presented a paradigmatic example of prayer offered by Jesus, commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer. The prayer commenced with the phrase "Our Father," denoting a close and familial bond with the divine being. The acknowledgment of God as "Father" served to reinforce the concept of humans embodying divine likeness. This concept highlighted the importance of establishing a close relationship akin to that between a parent and child, underscoring the inherent bond that humans possess with the divine, as a result of the shared likeness (Jeremias, 1971).

The Apostle Paul provided valuable insights into the essence of prayer and its correlation with the *imago Dei*. He discussed in Romans 8:26–27 the concept of the Holy Spirit interceding on behalf of believers through inexpressible utterances. The concept of the Spirit's intercession can be linked to the representation of God. Human beings, being created in the image of the divine, possess an inherent desire for connection with their creator. This longing has persisted, even in situations where verbal communication was insufficient, as the Holy Spirit effectively conveyed these indescribable yearnings (Wright, 2004).

The act of prayer has extended beyond the mere pursuit of solutions or the expression of desires. Engaging in this act brings about a profound transformation that enhances the connection to the sacred essence. The biblical verse found in James 4:8 offered guidance to individuals, suggesting that by approaching God, one can expect a reciprocal response as God draws near to them. The reciprocal action of approaching one another has underscored prayer as a bidirectional avenue, accentuating the significance of connection rather than a mere exchange. As individuals engage in the act of prayer, there is a simultaneous recognition of the inherent divine nature within humanity, leading to a gradual alignment with the intended blueprint of our creation (Boyd, 2000).

The connection between prayer and the concept of the image of God have been highly intertwined. Humans, being created in the *imago Dei*, inherently possess an innate capacity and desire for a deep connection with their creator. The act of prayer serves as a means of communication, in which individuals express their needs and gratitude, while also embracing and reaffirming their connection to a higher spiritual power. The Bible, by means of its diverse passages and verses, has emphasized this profound correlation, directing adherents towards a more profound and intimate communion with the divine.

Prayer and Spirituality

Prayer has served as both a religious ritual and a demonstration of one's spiritual beliefs (Ladd & Spilka, 2013). As differentiated from organized religion, spirituality has encompassed an individual's subjective and personalized relationship with the transcendent, frequently expressed through prayer. Prayer has also served as a means to glimpse an individual's spiritual realm, thereby providing valuable insights into their personal belief systems, core values, and contemplations regarding existential matters (Underwood & Teresi, 2002).

The correlation between prayer and spirituality has been emphasized by the various methods in which individuals employ prayer for spiritual manifestation and investigation. According to Pargament (2001), prayer has enabled individuals to delve into their inner selves, cultivate their spiritual development, and cultivate a personal connection with the divine. The nature of this relationship has been frequently characterized as deeply personal and intimate, reflecting the fundamental principles of spirituality, such as tranquility, meaning, and interconnectedness (Emmons, 2000).

Diverse manifestations of prayer, encompassing formal and ceremonial prayers and informal, individual ones, have been intricately linked to distinct dimensions of spirituality. Structured prayers can foster a sense of affiliation with a spiritual community and reinforce collective belief systems. Conversely, personal prayers have allowed individuals to confront their deepest emotions and spiritual doubts (Pargament, 2001).

Moreover, it has been observed that prayer can serve as a means of spiritual coping during adversity. During crises, individuals have frequently resorted to prayer to seek solace, guidance, and fortitude through their spiritual connection with the divine. The utilization of prayer has highlighted its significance in fostering spiritual resilience and adaptability, enabling individuals to effectively navigate life's challenges while maintaining a sense of spiritual purpose and hope (Pargament et al., 2011).

In summary, prayer has been pivotal in individuals' spiritual realm. Prayer, whether conducted collectively in communal rituals or individually in private meditations, has served as a means for individuals to express their spirituality, foster personal development, and cultivate resilience. Therefore, it has continued to be a fundamental component of spirituality, providing a deep understanding of the human spirit and its connection with the divine (Seeman et al., 2003).

God Attachment

The psychological construct known as God attachment has referred to the emotional and psychological connection that an individual establishes with their perception or concept of God (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Fundamentally, this phenomenon has elucidated how individuals perceive and engage with the divine entity, as a reliable foundation or reservoir of solace. The nature of one's interpersonal connections with God can profoundly impact an individual's spiritual welfare and exert a significant influence on their conduct.

The concept of God attachment has been based on attachment theory, which John Bowlby initially created, and Mary Ainsworth later developed (Bowlby, 1988). According to Bowlby (1988), the theory posited that individuals form cognitive representations of relationships through their early interactions with caregivers, subsequently influencing their future social interactions. Within spirituality, it has been common for God to assume the role of an attachment figure, providing individuals with a sense of security and a stable foundation (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). This paper presented a theoretical framework that examined the dynamics of individuals' relationship with God.

The quantification of attachment to God has been accomplished by using assessment instruments, such as the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI), developed by Beck and McDonald (2004). The assessment of the AGI encompasses two primary dimensions: avoidance, which pertains to the extent to which individuals maintain emotional detachment from God, and anxiety, which pertains to the extent to which individuals experience concerns regarding God's love and accessibility. Higher scores on avoidance and anxiety measures indicate insecure attachment, whereas lower scores indicate secure attachment.

Recent empirical studies have established a significant association between attachment to God and diverse dimensions of mental health and overall well-being. A recent study has shown a positive correlation between a secure attachment to God and various positive outcomes, including increased life satisfaction, improved emotional well-being, and heightened resilience (Min et al., 2020). Furthermore, it can potentially impact human behavior by fostering ethical and altruistic conduct while diminishing the propensity for involvement in hazardous behaviors (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007).

Positive Effects of Secure God Attachment

Secure attachment to God has been frequently associated with favorable psychological benefits (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2016). According to Granqvist et al. (2020), individuals who possess a secure attachment to God tend to perceive their deity as a reliable source of solace and protection, thereby establishing a steadfast basis for their ability to adapt and persevere amid various difficulties encountered throughout life.

Secure attachment to God positively impacts an individual's mental well-being. An increasing body of scholarly literature has indicated that individuals who possess a sense of security in their connection with a higher power commonly experience reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Moreover, it has been observed that individuals belonging to religious communities often demonstrate elevated self-esteem and overall life satisfaction, which can be attributed to the perceived sense of unconditional love and acceptance from their divine entity (Dein et al., 2020).

Secure attachment to God can be a coping strategy during heightened stress. According to Pargament (2017), empirical evidence has suggested that individuals who believe in a benevolent higher power may experience a heightened sense of security and a diminished perception of

susceptibility. In traumatic experiences, individuals with a secure attachment to God tend to draw upon their religious beliefs, fostering a heightened sense of resilience and facilitating emotional recuperation (Captari et al., 2022).

Secure attachment to God can also manifest in interpersonal relationships. Individuals who possess a secure attachment to a higher power are more inclined to exhibit healthier interpersonal relationships, which are characterized by heightened levels of empathy and forgiveness (Davis & Hook, 2019). The individuals' conviction in the love and acceptance of God motivates them to exhibit similar benevolence towards others, thereby promoting enhanced interpersonal harmony and connectivity (Webb et al., 2020).

The concept of secure attachment to God has been linked to the manifestation of prosocial behavior. Recent research has suggested that individuals who possess a secure attachment to a divine entity are more inclined to engage in prosocial behaviors, including assisting others, participating in volunteer work, and making charitable donations (Malinakova et al., 2021). The phenomenon described has been commonly ascribed to internalizing religious doctrines that advocate for acts of benevolence, affection, and philanthropy (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2017).

In summary, the empirical evidence has supported the notion that a secure attachment to God yields various favorable outcomes, such as improved psychological welfare, adaptive stress management strategies, more robust interpersonal connections, and heightened tendencies towards prosocial conduct. The diverse cultural and personal contexts in which these outcomes have been interpreted have contributed to the varying perspectives on their significance. However, a secure relationship with a higher power has had positive implications across multiple domains of human existence.

Prayer and Attachment with God

Prayer has been considered to have an impact on psychological well-being, and this effect may be dependent on an individual's attachment to God. Individuals with a secure attachment to God have been likely to experience mental health benefits from praying. In contrast, people without a secure attachment to God may not see the same positive effects (Bradshaw & Kent, 2020). Another study found a strong relationship between the frequency of prayer and secure attachment to God related to psychological well-being. People who reported having a secure attachment to God tended to pray more often and reported mental health benefits. But people who saw God as very distant and unresponsive often reported high anxiety symptoms (Ellison et al., 2014). Therefore, having a secure attachment to God has been a critical factor in understanding the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being.

Frequency of Prayer and Well-Being

Research among Muslim Canadians has shown that praying more frequently has been related to greater happiness. This research has shown that people who pray regularly experience the kinds of positive emotions that are good for their health. The study also found that spirituality mediated the connection between prayer and happiness (Albatnuni & Koszycki, 2020). This provided support for the idea that engaging in spiritual practices, like prayer and meditation, might boost one's sense of happiness. Researchers discovered that those who prayed regularly experienced significant reductions in stress and increased feelings of tranquility and comfort (Nahud et al., 2020). The results of these studies corroborated one another, demonstrating the link between prayer and happiness. Regular and consistent prayer, especially when accompanied with other spiritual practices, has been shown to improve mental health. So, prayer can be a powerful tool for enhancing one's own sense of happiness.

The frequency of prayer has been associated with Maslow's needs hierarchy. In one study, researchers found that prayer was associated with happiness through the interaction of Maslow's needs hierarchy in India, Turkey, and the United States. The sense of belonging has been associated with the frequency of prayer and happiness. The study found a significant association between the frequency of prayer and income related to happiness. However, the study showed that prayer frequency was not associated with happiness in the United States. In the United States, frequency of prayer was supplanted by self-expression in association with happiness (Babula, 2023).

A study by Campbell (2018) looked at the connection between prayer and test anxiety. The study sought to ascertain whether there was a relationship between the frequency of prayer and test anxiety, as well as the impact of prayer on people's levels of test anxiety. Based on the findings, people who prayed before a test reported having less test anxiety than people who did not pray. The study also showed a beneficial relationship between prayer frequency and reduced test anxiety. The researcher concluded that prayer could significantly reduce test anxiety and may aid people in managing stress in high-stress circumstances. These results implied that prayer can be a helpful tool for people who struggle with test anxiety (Campbell, 2018).

Psychological Well-Being

The significance of psychological well-being in relation to human functioning and overall life satisfaction has been increasingly acknowledged in both research and practice. Psychological well-being has encompassed various dimensions, such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). According to Keyes (2005), mental well-being has encompassed more than just the

absence of mental disorders; it has involved thriving and flourishing, enabling individuals to engage in society actively.

Recent research has indicated significant correlations between psychological well-being and multiple domains of life, including physical health, work productivity, and social relationships (Steptoe et al., 2015). Previous research has established a positive association between elevated levels of well-being and enhanced immune functioning, reduced incidence of disease, and increased lifespan (Cohen & Pressman, 2006). Additionally, extant literature has indicated that a positive correlation exists between individuals' well-being and their workplace performance and creativity (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

The recognition of psychological well-being as a crucial factor in preventing mental health disorders and cultivating resilience has been steadily growing. According to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions can expand an individual's immediate range of thoughts and actions. This expansion has subsequently contributed to developing long-lasting personal resources, encompassing physical, intellectual, social, and psychological aspects (Fredrickson, 2001). According to Fredrickson and Joiner (2002), the theory posited that cultivating psychological well-being may protect against developing mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety.

Nevertheless, despite the increasing body of evidence supporting its significance, psychological well-being has tended to be disregarded in various domains, such as education and the workplace. Therefore, it is imperative to implement interventions that are specifically designed to enhance overall well-being. A systematic review conducted by Sin and Lyubomirsky (2009) found that positive psychological interventions, encompassing various techniques and

therapies designed to foster positive emotions, behaviors, or cognitions, have demonstrated efficacy in improving overall well-being.

Spiritual Disciplines and Psychological Well-Being

The practices of prayer, meditation, and mindfulness have been at the core of spiritual disciplines. Numerous studies have found these practices to foster psychological well-being. Through them, people can develop a great awareness, increase focus, and have a deeper sense of self. Researchers have proposed that this practice can positively influence individuals' psychological well-being. Studies have also demonstrated that meditation can enhance psychological well-being. One study reported that people who consistently engage in meditation reported having a lower level of anxiety, depression, and stress (Vijayaraghavan & Chandran, 2022). There have also been some types of meditation-based interventions to help people manage their stress levels. For instance, mindfulness-based stress reduction positively reduces stress-related symptoms (Grossman et al., 2004). Furthermore, meditation has been shown to improve life satisfaction, regulate emotion, and increase compassion.

Prayer has been a core component of spiritual disciplines that various religious groups across the globe have practiced. It has been a type of communication with a higher power. Researchers have studied the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being for over a decade. Prayer has been strongly correlated with psychological well-being. Individuals have often reported using prayer as an effective coping mechanism to manage various mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Newman et al., 2023). Prayer has also provided strong support for people who feel lonely and has increased their purpose.

Mindfulness was another spiritual discipline that involved being present in the here and now without judgment. Both secular and non-secular individuals have practiced it. Like prayer,

mindfulness has been found to be helpful in helping people with their stress, anxiety, and depression (Rehman et al., 2023). Mindfulness can help in emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and life satisfaction.

Researchers have not exactly known which spiritual discipline has a more substantial impact on psychological well-being, but they have reported several things that can influence someone's overall well-being when engaging in any of these practices, such as an increase in self-awareness, reduction of stress, lowering of anxiety and depression, and a better sense of self and purpose. Some researchers have also suggested that these practices may activate neural pathways associated with positive emotions and well-being (Newman et al., 2023).

Prayer Types and Well-Being

One study showed that disclosure to God has been mediated between colloquial prayer and meditative prayer and mental health but found no association between ritual prayer and mental health among Christians. Moreover, the study reported a lack of relationship between disclosure to God and mental health. Jewish and Muslims also reported a lower level of mental health compared to Christians (Winkeljohn et al., 2017).

Communal prayers can help people gain emotional support that promotes their well-being. Communal prayer can also lead to positive social interaction, a sense of belonging, and a sense of empowerment. People have reported feeling empowered when they pray for others. Prayer can be utilized as an effective coping mechanism to manage stressful situations. People have often turned to God when their lives become unmanageable. Prayer increases awareness about self and relationship with God (Callender et al., 2022).

Centering prayer has been a type of Christian meditation examined by Fox and colleagues (2015). The participants' reports of their experiences with centering prayer have been

analyzed using traditional content-analysis techniques. The researchers discovered that individuals had a variety of favorable experiences, such as a higher sense of serenity, a closer relationship with God, and less worry and stress (Fox et al., 2015).

Praying for others has provided greater psychological well-being than praying for oneself. Participants in one study reported significant improvement in physical and mental health over time when praying for others instead of for themselves. The findings also suggested that praying for familiar people is more beneficial psychologically than praying for complete strangers. Praying for familiar people provides a sense of connection—an essential element for psychological well-being (Ironson & Ahmad, 2022).

One study found that offering prayer is positively related to mental health. The more a person prays for someone, the better their psychological well-being will be. People who did not engage in prayer regularly reported lower mental health satisfaction. The study also mentioned that praying and mindfulness are associated with mental health (Ijaz et al., 2017).

Upward prayer has been beneficial for psychological well-being. Upward prayer provides a place for the believer to dialogue with God instead of focusing on their current issue. Prayer also enables people to distance themselves from their problems and strengthen their relationship with God, which can be very helpful for their mental well-being (Puchalska-Wasyl & Zarzycka, 2020).

Certain types of prayer can positively or negatively impact psychological well-being. A study found that prayer of thanksgiving is positively associated with psychological well-being, while prayer of supplication negatively impacts individual psychological well-being. Prayer of thanksgiving can improve someone's self-esteem and optimism (Zarzyck & Krok, 2021).

Emotional Well-being and Prayer

An extensive body of research has studied the relationship between prayer and emotional well-being. Some findings have suggested a positive relationship with religious practices, including prayer. Participants have reported increased life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and feeling less depressed and anxious when they prayed (Kilbourne et al., 2009). A study found that people who reported praying more often had higher levels of happiness and optimism. These findings highlighted that prayer could improve individual overall mental health (Anderson & Nunnelley, 2016).

However, some findings have provided a complex nuance between the relationship between prayer and emotional well-being, due to different factors that can influence the connection between the variables, such as types of prayers, frequency of prayer, and individual religiosity (Pargament, 2007). Some studies have not demonstrated the correlation between prayer and emotional well-being. According to these findings, prayer does not directly affect improving participants' emotional well-being (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018). The issue might be related to the methodology limitation of prior studies, including the self-reporting bias of the effect of prayer practice by participants, which might be difficult to measure.

Studies have shown that certain types of prayer practice can positively affect emotional well-being. For instance, one study highlighted that meditative prayer can benefit individuals' emotional well-being. People who reported engaging in mediative prayer had a lower level of anxiety (Albatnuni & Koszycki, 2020). However, petitionary prayer, which implied addressing a higher power, has had mixed responses based on the request and the desired outcome (Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). Furthermore, certain personality styles can also affect the relationship between

prayer and emotional well-being. Individuals with a high sense of self and optimism may derive more significant benefits from prayer than those with lower self-esteem.

Psychological Benefits of Prayer

Prayer can increase job satisfaction and overall mental well-being. One study conducted among teachers found that teachers who often pray reported a lower level of burnout compared to those who do not pray. The research also found significant improvement in teachers' mental well-being when they used prayer in daily activities. Prayer can be considered an effective coping strategy to lower stress levels and manage negative emotions (Chirico et al., 2020). People who pray better understand their current issue and feel more emotionally accepted than those who only think about their problems (McCulloch & Parks-Stamm, 2020).

Prayer as a religious involvement has been a protective factor against feelings of depression and despair when going through a stressful situation. Religious involvement has also been an effective coping strategy for stress-related cognitive decline. Religious involvement has encouraged supportive relationships, which can be beneficial for mental health (Hosseini et al., 2022). Another study has shown that adolescents who regularly participate in religious activities, such as prayer and worship, have greater psychological well-being and a lower risk of mental health issues. They also demonstrated great strength of character and positive behaviors. Participation in religious activities teach how to behave and how to develop a good relationship with God, which can be very beneficial for their mental well-being (Chen & VanderWeele, 2018).

Groover (2020) investigated the effects of prayer on reducing anxiety. This study explored the relationship between prayer and anxiety and sought to determine whether prayer could be a helpful tool in reducing anxiety levels in individuals. The author used a qualitative

research method and collected data through in-depth interviews with participants who regularly engaged in prayer. The results suggested that prayer can positively impact reducing anxiety, as many participants reported feeling a sense of peace, calm, and comfort after praying. The author also noted that the impact of prayer on reducing anxiety may vary from person to person and may be influenced by factors, such as the individual's level of faith and religious beliefs. The study highlighted the need for further research in this area, as well as the potential benefits of incorporating prayer as a tool for reducing anxiety in mental health treatment (Groover, 2020).

The impact of a written prayer strategy on the anxiety levels of moms of children with cancer was examined by Ahmadi et al. (2019). In their study, the scientists looked at how a written prayer strategy affected the anxiety levels of mothers of children receiving cancer treatment. According to the findings, the mothers' anxiety levels were much lower when they used the written prayer strategy compared to a control group. The authors concluded that the written prayer technique would be a helpful strategy for lowering anxiety among mothers of children with cancer. These findings implied that prayer can be a valuable tool for those who are experiencing stress and worry, especially in trying circumstances, like taking care of a child who has a severe illness (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

Bartkowski and colleagues (2017) looked for a relationship between religious involvement and psychological distress, emphasizing anxiety symptoms among American adults. The authors examined prayer as a protective influence versus meditation on anxiety-related psychological distress. The results showed that individual prayer demonstrated a modest negative relationship with anxiety. The findings also indicated that people who experience anxiety symptoms are more likely to seek out religious support through communal prayer. The researcher discovered a positive relationship between worship attendance and anxiety symptoms. The

findings showed that people who attended religious services reported lower anxiety symptoms (Bartkowski et al., 2017).

Breland-Noble et al. (2015) investigated the connection between spirituality, religious coping, and depression among African-American youth. The study aimed to examine how spirituality and religious coping mechanisms affect the mental health of young people with depressive disorder. The findings indicated that among African-American youth with depression, spirituality and religious coping were related to better mental health outcomes. The authors concluded that spirituality and religious coping might help assist young people with depression to manage their symptoms and enhance their general well-being. These results underlined the need to consider spirituality and religious coping when treating depression in this demographic (Breland-Noble et al., 2015).

The effects of prayer as a coping mechanism for nurses was examined by Cain (2019). The study examined how prayer could help nurses manage stress and improve their overall well-being. The results demonstrated that nurses' well-being were enhanced and stress levels were reduced by prayer. This study supported the notion that prayer can assist nurses in managing the demands of their jobs, enhance their general health, and improve their sense of well-being. These results implied that including prayer in nurses' self-care plans may be helpful in reducing stress and fostering well-being in the nursing field (Cain, 2019).

There have been certain situations where prayer might not be beneficial for psychological well-being. A study conducted with natural disaster survivors found that prayer and hope were positively associated with depression. Hope and optimism have been negative predictors of depression following a natural disaster, which meant that the absence of hope and optimism can be depressing (Raney et al., 2022).

Impact of Prayer on Health Issues

Prayer can improve the quality of life among people with health issues. Abu et al. (2018) conducted a study among 15 patients with cardiovascular disease and found a positive relationship between religiosity and quality of life among 10 participants. Religiousness can lead to positive emotions and increase self-esteem, which can be beneficial for overall physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. The study also found that lower spiritual well-being was associated with poorer physical health (Abu et al., 2018).

Hamilton et al. (2020) explored the use of prayer by individuals who are facing life-threatening illnesses. The study examined the impact of prayer on the spiritual, psychological, and social well-being of individuals with life-threatening illnesses. The authors used qualitative research and collected data through in-depth interviews with participants. The results showed that prayer could play a significant role in helping individuals facing life-threatening illnesses to feel a sense of connectedness to God, their inner self, and others. Participants reported that prayer helped them feel more positive and optimistic about their situation and provided them with comfort and support during difficult times. The study highlighted the importance of spiritual support for individuals facing life-threatening illnesses and the potential benefits of incorporating prayer to cope with illness (Hamilton et al., 2020).

Durmuş and Ekinçi (2022) conducted a study with a group of patients who received hemodialysis treatment and reported that spiritual care significantly decreased the level of anxiety and depression among patients. Spirituality has also been a very effective non-pharmacological method to cope with anxiety and depression. Spiritual care can also help patients from experiencing negative emotions as they arise. Spiritual intervention, such as prayer, effectively reduces high levels of depression (Durmuş & Ekinçi, 2022).

Prayer can provide a sense of support and connection, which can be very beneficial for individuals with life-threatening illnesses. Through prayer, people find comfort and assurance that God is with them amidst their struggles. Prayer provides a place for people to vent their issues and lay down everything in God's hands (Hamilton et al., 2020). One study found that integrating prayer into patient care can benefit their mental well-being. Researchers also found that prayer is integral to patients' recovery (Yamada et al., 2020).

Historical and Cultural Context of Prayer in the African-American Community

Prayer has played a vital role in the African-American community, as a way to cope with challenges and life problems. During the earliest days of slavery, Africans used prayer to connect with their African ancestors to ask for liberation, freedom, and change for a better life. Prayer was a way to help them find hope in their hopelessness and deliverance from their White master. As of today, prayer has continued to be an element of culture and religious traditions in the African community (Skipper et al., 2018).

Historical Context of Prayer in the African-American Community

Lincoln and Lawrence (1990) provided an overview of the historical context of prayer in the African community. They said that during slavery, enslaved Africans were not allowed to practice the religion of their ancestors. They abided to worship the religion of their master, which was Christianity. Since they were limited to Christianity as a religion, they found a way to adapt it to their own cultural and religious practices. They incorporated African rhythms in the prayer and hymns as a call and response to slavery (Lincoln & Lawrence, 1990).

Christianity, as a new religion for the enslaved Africans American, became a vital element to help them find hope for a better future. They hoped that one day they would be free from the burden of slavery the same way that Moses freed the Jews from slavery in Egypt by

helping them find the promised land. Christianity also provided them with a sense of community and belonging. They spent time praying and worshipping together and supporting one another. They also found comfort and the strength to resist the brutality of slavery and seek freedom. Christianity was more than a new religion for marginalized Africans; it was a tool for survival (Mohamed et al., 2021).

After the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865, African Americans had the freedom to organize and form their churches. Since then, church has become a predominant part of the African-American culture because it provided a sense of togetherness and hope for a new beginning. Prayer continued to play an essential part during religious services because it helped African-American believers to connect with a higher power and with one another (Raboteau, 1996).

Prayer played an important role during the civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. Prayer served as a catalyst to unite people from different backgrounds and races for a common cause to request equality for all. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., a prominent civil rights movement leader, saw prayer as a tool to inspire people to act toward change. Prayer was frequently used in nonviolent protest to demonstrate faith and seek divine intervention in the fight for civil rights. Activists of the civil rights movement used prayer during times of hardship and violence to find comfort and hope for a better future for African Americans in the United States (Shearer, 2015). The use of prayer during the civil rights movement highlighted the role of religion in social and political change in the United States.

Cultural Context of Prayer in the African-American Community

Prayer has been part of the African-American community's cultural values and beliefs, which have been passed down throughout generations. Researchers have investigated the cultural

aspect of prayer in the African-American community. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) provided insight into the role of the Black Church in the African-American community and how prayer has been part of the cultural traditions. They emphasized that prayer has been used as a source of emotional support to deal with racial discrimination and oppression in the African-American community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Hayward and Krause (2015) explored the role of religion in dealing with racial discrimination among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. Their study investigated how religious beliefs and practices are used to cope with racial discrimination. The authors used qualitative research and collected data through in-depth interviews with participants. The results showed that religion was an important resource for coping with racial discrimination, as it provided individuals with a sense of meaning, purpose, and comfort in facing adversity. Participants reported using religious rituals and practices, such as prayer and reading religious texts, as a way to deal with feelings of anger, frustration, and stress related to racial discrimination (Hayward & Krause, 2015).

Levin and Taylor (1998) talked about the role of prayer as an important aspect of religious involvement among African Americans. Their findings suggested that prayer, including religious involvement, contributes to the overall well-being of African Americans. When a Black person goes through hard times and challenges, they turn to prayer to find comfort and hope. Additionally, the positive effect of prayer on well-being has been stronger among women than men (Levin & Taylor, 1998).

Prayer has been utilized in African-American culture to deal with physical health issues. A study conducted by Holt et al. (2009) with 23 African Americans with cancer indicated that religion is used to cope with cancer among African-American patients. Prayer, as part of the

religious beliefs and practices, helped African Americans to maintain a positive attitude toward their illness. The reliance on prayer as a coping strategy to deal with physical illness provided insight into the importance of prayer among African Americans (Holt et al., 2009).

Prayer has also been viewed as a way to connect with God and the community among African Americans. Through prayer, the believer can connect with a higher being, who can offer comfort, hope, and help and provide for their daily needs. They no longer have to rely on a master to feed them because they have God, who can fulfill all their needs. Prayer for one another has entailed a sense of community and unity (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Communal Prayer

Communal prayer has been a shared religious practice, where individuals gather together to pray collectively. People have participated in communal prayer through support groups, religious services, and family gatherings. Various studies have found an effect of communal prayer on psychological well-being. Communal prayer can enhance emotional well-being and provide a sense of belonging and connection, which are very essential for psychological well-being. Participants engaging in communal prayer have reported a lower level of anxiety and depression (Bolen et al., 2009). Furthermore, participants have observed that communal prayer can foster a sense of purpose and meaning in life. In a longitudinal study, participants who participated in communal prayer demonstrated a higher level of life satisfaction and resilience (Pargament et al., 2021).

Studies have demonstrated that communal prayer can be beneficial in helping people cope with stress and life challenges. Jarego et al. (2023) conducted a study to investigate the impact of both private and communal prayer on pain management. The participants, after engaging in communal prayer, reported having a lower intensity of pain. The findings indicated

that communal prayer has a significant effect on physical and emotional well-being (Jarego et al., 2023). A study by Upenieks (2023) showed a relationship between communal prayer and social bonds. Participants reported having a deeper social bond with loved ones and family members when they participated in communal prayer. Having a strong support system can also be beneficial for managing stress and improving psychological well-being (Upenieks, 2023).

Cultural beliefs can influence the practice and understanding of communal prayer. A study by Scheindlin (2001) found that different religious beliefs shape the practice of communal prayer based on the spiritual needs and values of the community. For certain traditions, communal prayer can provide a sense of collective identity. For instance, immigrant communities engage in communal prayer because it is part of their cultural expression (Scheindlin, 2001).

Evaluations of Research Results and Limitations

The frequency and quality of prayer have been associated with psychological well-being, particularly if someone has a secure attachment to God. People who pray more often tend to have better mental health outcomes, including lower anxiety and stress levels. Additionally, spirituality and the sense of connection to a higher power through prayer can positively impact subjective well-being (Babula, 2023).

Research findings have suggested that the type of prayer can have different effects on psychological well-being. Praying for others and offering upward prayer can positively impact mental health, while prayer of supplication can have negative effects. Communal prayer can provide emotional support and a sense of empowerment, and centering prayer can increase serenity and strengthen one's relationship with God (Callender et al., 2022). Moreover, the

frequency of prayer has been associated with well-being and having a secure attachment to God has been crucial for experiencing mental health benefits from prayer.

Prayer can have positive effects on job satisfaction, mental well-being, and anxiety reduction. Prayer can also serve as an effective coping mechanism for stress and negative emotions. Religious involvement, including prayer, can be protective against feelings of depression and despair in stressful situations (Chen & VanderWeele, 2018). Participation in religious activities may also promote positive behaviors and psychological well-being, particularly in adolescents. Prayer can be a helpful tool for managing stress and enhancing the general health and well-being of individuals in various professions, such as nursing. However, the benefits of prayer may depend on individual beliefs and circumstances, and there are situations where prayer may not be beneficial for psychological well-being.

Prayer can improve the quality of life among people with health issues. Prayer and religiousness have been linked to positive emotions and increased self-esteem, which can improve physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. Prayer can also play a significant role in helping individuals facing life-threatening illnesses to feel a sense of connectedness to God, their inner self, and others, providing comfort and support during difficult times. Spiritual care, including prayer, can effectively reduce anxiety and depression levels among patients, and integrating prayer into patient care can benefit their mental well-being and recovery. Overall, the review suggested that prayer can be a valuable tool for improving the well-being of people with health issues (Abu et al., 2018).

Prayer has played a significant role in the African-American community as a way to cope with challenges and life problems. During slavery, enslaved Africans used prayer to connect with their African ancestors and seek liberation, freedom, and change. Christianity became a vital

element for them to find hope for a better future and provided them with a sense of community and belonging. After slavery, prayer continued to be an essential part of African-American culture and played an important role during the civil rights movements in the United States. Prayer served as a tool to unite people from different backgrounds and races and inspire them to act toward social and political change (Shearer, 2015).

Prayer has been used as a source of emotional support to deal with racial discrimination and oppression in the African-American community. Religion and prayer have been used as coping strategies to deal with physical health issues and maintain a positive attitude toward illness. The use of prayer has also helped to connect with God and the community among African Americans, providing a sense of meaning, purpose, and comfort in facing adversity. The review emphasized the significant role that prayer has played in the African-American community's cultural traditions, providing a way to connect with a higher power and one another and find hope and strength to resist the challenges of life (Hayward & Krause, 2015).

Limitations

Research on the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being among African Americans has identified several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting findings. One such limitation has been sampling bias, as many studies have relied on non-random or convenience sampling, which may not have accurately represented the broader African-American population. Self-report bias has been another limitation, as participants may not have always reported their experiences accurately, which can skew the findings. Additionally, many studies have used limited measures of prayer and psychological well-being, which may not have fully captured the complex relationship between the two.

The lack of control groups in many studies has also made it difficult to attribute changes in psychological well-being solely to prayer. Moreover, correlational studies cannot establish causality between prayer and psychological well-being, and cultural differences in African-American spirituality may not have been fully accounted for in some studies. Another limitation has been the limited focus on negative outcomes, as many studies have focused on the positive effects of prayer but have neglected potential negative effects. Finally, few studies have followed participants over time, which has made it difficult to assess the long-term effects of prayer on psychological well-being. Therefore, further research was needed to fully understand the relationship between prayer and psychological well-being among African Americans.

Summary

A growing number of studies have examined the relationship between prayer and African Americans' psychological well-being. African Americans have frequently turned to prayer as a coping mechanism, and research has shown that doing so has been linked to higher levels of psychological well-being. A study by Krause (2003) found that African Americans who used prayer as a coping mechanism experienced higher levels of positive emotions, self-esteem, and life satisfaction and lower levels of depressive symptoms.

Higher levels of psychological well-being among African Americans have been correlated with prayer frequency. In a study by Nguyen et al. (2017), Black Americans who said that they prayed more frequently reported higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect, as well as lower levels of negative affect and depressive symptoms. The content of prayer could be crucial for psychological health. According to a study by Greenwood et al. (2019), Black Americans who expressed their thankfulness in prayer reported having higher levels of life

satisfaction and positive affect, as well as lower levels of negative affect and depressive symptoms, than those who did not express their thanks in prayer.

The association between prayer and psychological well-being among African Americans may also be influenced by the social support offered by church communities. In a study by Hodge et al. (2019), the psychological well-being of Black Americans who reported receiving social support from their church group was higher, and this association was partially mediated by prayer.

All things considered, these findings have implied that prayer may be a significant coping mechanism for African Americans and that prayer's frequency and content may be crucial for fostering psychological well-being. Also, there may be a connection between prayer and psychological well-being, due to the social support that religious communities offer.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

The researcher used a phenomenological approach to investigate the impact of prayer on psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals. A phenomenological approach was best suited for this research because it helped capture the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher intended to select nine participants for this study to delve deeply into each individual's experiences and understanding of prayer and psychological well-being. The results of this study provided insights on how individuals perceive and experience the impact of prayer on their psychological well-being. It also enabled a deeper understanding of how cultural beliefs and environmental factors influence the psychological impact of prayer. The methodology section of this research provides an overview of the study's design, including the research questions, settings, participants, and procedures. It also includes how data was collected and analyzed, ethical considerations, and credibility.

Design

A qualitative phenomenological study was used to investigate the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, focusing particularly on how prayer impacts their psychological well-being. A phenomenological study was best suited for this study because it provided the depth of understanding of individual personal experience and subjective reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants in this study were able to describe their experiences and perceptions of the influence of prayer on their psychological well-being. The phenomenological research allowed the researcher to explore participants' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in depth in relation to prayer in their own words (Van Manen, 2016).

The researcher used descriptive phenomenology for this study, due to its focus on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals in a particular context, which, in this, case was African-American Christian evangelicals and their engagement with prayer. This phenomenological approach provided a detailed description and analysis of participants' subjective experiences, allowing a deep delve into their experiences related to prayer practices and psychological well-being. It also helped the researcher gain insight into the role and impact of prayer on their psychological well-being.

Prayer among African-American Christian evangelicals has not just been a religious act based on a particular dogma; it has also been a cultural and spiritual practice that has a significant influence on their overall well-being. The use of a descriptive phenomenological study enabled the researcher to uncover the holistic influence of prayer, which was more than what could have been learned from a quantitative approach. This approach acknowledged the subjective and interpretive experiences of the participants, which was crucial among African Americans, due to their unique historical and cultural dynamics (Staton-Tindall et al., 2013).

A qualitative phenomenological design addressed the existing gap in the literature in exploring the role of prayer in the psychological well-being of African-American evangelicals. The result of this research provided valuable insight for mental health providers, religious leaders, and community members, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnection between prayer and psychological well-being.

Research Questions

Research Question One

How do African-American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being?

Research Question Two

In what ways do African-American Christian evangelicals perceive prayer as impacting their coping mechanisms during times of stress or adversity?

Research Question Three

How do cultural and religious beliefs within the African-American Christian evangelical community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological wellness?

Setting

The setting for this study was predominantly within urban African-American Christian evangelical communities in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia. Northwest Roanoke was chosen as a setting for research on the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals and their relationship with prayer in regard to psychological well-being, due to its rich historical and cultural significance within the African-American population. This region also had a strong presence of African-American Christian evangelical churches. The residents of Northwest Roanoke had a strong tie with churches in the communities, which made them best suited to explore the influence of prayer on psychological well-being.

In addition, participants were more open to sharing their experiences, due to their familiarity with churches in the community, which enhanced the data's quality and depth. The setting not only provided better access to engage with participants but also aligned with ethical practices, which emphasized respect and cultural sensitivity. The results of this study provided relevant insight on the impact of prayer on psychological well-being in this community and the broader community of African-American Christian evangelicals.

Participants

The study involved 10 participants, who were carefully selected based on their experience within the African-American Christian evangelical community in Northwest Roanoke. This study included males and females between the ages of 18–65 years. The researcher selected this age range to include a diverse group of African-American Christian evangelicals at different life stages. The criteria for selecting participants included the following (see Appendix A): 1) Individuals self-identify as African American and as members of the Christian evangelical community; 2) Participants are actively engaged in their church community by attending church activities, such as worship and prayer services; and 3) Participants must have been residents of Northwest Roanoke for the last 2 years.

The researcher used purposive sampling for this study on the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive sampling was a key technique in qualitative research that involved selecting participants based on certain characteristics or experiences that were relevant to the research topic. This sampling method allowed the researcher to select the appropriate participants, who provided details about their lived experiences with prayer within the African-American Christian evangelical community.

The researcher promoted this study via social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and in church bulletins and announcements to target those who attend religious services regularly (see Appendix B). People who expressed interest in participating in this study were screened to ensure that they met the criteria, and those who met the requirements were invited to participate in the study (see Appendix C). During the recruitment process, the researcher informed prospective participants that their participation was voluntary and that they

could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher also ensured the confidentiality of information provided by participants in the study. Participants were compensated with \$25 Amazon gift cards for their participation.

Procedures

This study followed several steps before data collection to ensure that the process adhered to ethical standards. The researcher obtained approval from the institutional review board (IRB) at Liberty University (see Appendix D). An IRB approval was crucial in this research to ensure that participants' rights and well-being were protected (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Participants received informed consent that highlighted the purpose of the study (see Appendix E), procedures involved, rights, potential benefits, and drawbacks of the participants, including confidentiality and voluntary participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the recruitment of participants, the researcher used purposive sampling to select specific participants who met the criteria of the study. The following questions were asked to ensure that participants qualified for this study:

- What is your age?
- Do you identify yourself as African American?
- Are you currently residing in Northwest Roanoke?
- Are you an active church member?
- Over the past 2 years, how often have you participated in church activities? Would you say that your participation has been weekly, monthly, or more sporadic?
- Do you believe in prayer?
- Are you available to participate in an interview?

After recruiting the participants, the data was collected through in-depth interviews, which provided participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences regarding prayer in relation to their psychological well-being. The researcher scheduled the interview dates and times to meet with the participants. The interviews were completed in person or via Zoom. Interviews lasted between 60–90 minutes.

After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed the interviews for analysis. The method of thematic analysis was used to identify different patterns and themes in the data. The use of thematic analysis aligned with the phenomenological framework and helped uncover the essence of participants' experiences. To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher provided direct quotes from the participants. Credibility was essential to establishing trustworthiness in the qualitative study because it showed that the research findings were a good representation of the participants' original data (Creswell, 2018).

The Researcher's Role

As a researcher in this phenomenological study on the lived experiences of African Americans with prayer and psychological well-being, my experience was considered in the data collection. I grew up in a Christian evangelical family. I served as a youth leader in a predominantly African-American church for 5 years. Prayer had played a significant role in helping me deal with daily stressors. I understood that my personal experiences as a part of the African-American Christian evangelical community could have influenced how the data was interpreted and conclusions were formed. In order to avoid any personal bias, I diligently maintained personal boundaries with participants. I interpreted the data through the lens of participants' personal experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being and ensure impartiality.

To maintain objectivity in this research exploring the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, I utilized the practice of bracketing, where I set aside my personal beliefs and experiences as a member of the community. Bracketing did not mean that I denied my identity but instead that I recognized that my personal beliefs as a religious leader and a theologian could influence the research process. I ensured that the interpretations of the data collected reflected participants' experiences rather than being influenced by my personal biases. By incorporating bracketing, I gained a stronger ethical and methodological foundation, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of individuals' mental well-being journeys.

Data Collection

The principal method of gathering data for this qualitative study entailed conducting interviews. Engaging in the process of conducting interviews was highly beneficial because it allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the participants' personal experiences, thoughts, processes, and viewpoints. Through interviews, participants had the ability to articulate their experiences in their own language without having to provide a predefined response (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person, whatever worked best for the participants. The design of the interview questions was open-ended to allow participants to provide more detailed and elaborate responses (see Appendix F).

Interviews

The interview questions in this study were designed to align with existing literature. These questions were instrumental in forming the semi-structured interviews:

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your background?
2. How long have you been a part of the African-American Christian evangelical community?

3. Can you describe your regular religious and prayer practices?
4. How would you describe your personal experiences with prayer?
5. In what ways do you think prayer influences your psychological well-being?
6. Can you share an instance where prayer significantly impacted your mood or mental state?
7. What role do you believe prayer plays in your overall psychological well-being?
8. How do you utilize prayer during challenging or stressful times?
9. Could you recall a specific moment where prayer helped you cope with stress or adversity?
10. Do you think prayer changes how you respond to difficult situations? Can you give an example?
11. What aspects of prayer do you find most supportive when dealing with life's challenges?
12. How do your cultural or religious beliefs shape your practice of prayer?
13. Are there particular teachings or traditions in your community that influence how you pray?
14. What unique perspectives on prayer do you think the African-American Christian evangelical community holds?
15. How are cultural and religious beliefs about prayer communicated within your community?

Questions 1 and 2 aimed to understand participants' background information and their involvement in the community. These questions provided a solid foundation for interpreting subsequent responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These questions also provided an excellent way for participants to share a bit about themselves and set the path for the subsequent questions.

Questions 3 and 4 explored participants' regular religious practices and their personal experiences with prayer. It was very important to gather information on participants' personal experiences with prayer to see how it has been part of their daily lives and their spiritual journey. Prayer can be a source of guidance and reflection in the participants' lives (Foster, 1992).

Questions 5 and 6 focused on the effect of prayer on psychological well-being. These questions aimed to uncover participants' perceptions of how prayer affects their mood and mental health. Research has shown that prayer can positively influence an individual when dealing with life stressors. Furthermore, prayer can decrease adult anxiety and stress (Ellison et al., 2014).

Questions 7 and 8 emphasized the role of prayer in maintaining psychological well-being. These questions aimed to understand how participants use prayer as a coping mechanism to help navigate challenging situations beyond just praying as part of their religious practices. Prayer can be used as a tool that individuals use to maintain their psychological well-being (Ai et al., 2021).

Questions 9 and 10 gathered specific examples from participants of using prayer as a coping strategy in challenging situations. These questions provided concrete evidence of the effect of prayer on psychological well-being. They also validated participants' subjective experiences of prayer in their personal lives.

Questions 11 and 12 identified the supportive aspects of prayer from the participants' perspective. The research aimed to gather information on how prayer can provide personal and emotional support to the participants. These questions also showed how participants' cultures can shape their prayer lives. Koenig (2012) argued that the supportive aspect of prayer can foster resilience in individuals during challenging times.

Questions 13, 14, and 15 delved deeper into the cultural and community influences. These questions aimed to explore the cultural perspective of participants and how their

community influenced their prayer practices. Pargament (2011) highlighted that culture can shape the form and frequency of prayer for individuals and their role in the community.

Data Analysis

In this data analysis, the researcher utilized inductive coding to identify different themes, patterns, and categories in the data. In inductive coding, the process of dissecting the code derived from the data itself (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of breaking up data and labeling it into codes was to help the researcher analyze similarities and differences within the data. Thus, the data was divided into smaller pieces, identifying a code from each subset of data. This process involved reading through the data several times and labeling similar data groups.

When discussing the data, the researcher summarized common themes from the data and interpreted them. The themes derived from participants' statements based on the interview questions. Different themes originated from the participants' statements, and the researcher analyzed them to demonstrate the significance of the study. This process enabled the researcher to discuss how the new findings about the impact of prayer on psychological well-being fit into existing knowledge and how they contributed to it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is crucial in a qualitative study because it ensures that findings from the data collection and analysis are accurately representative of the participants' perspectives, addressing potential bias and limitations for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the research's integrity, this study included the components of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

It was very crucial to ensure the credibility of the research findings from the participants. Credibility was another way to say that the findings were valid and reliable. It also indicated that the findings were an accurate representation of the participants' personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the credibility of this study, the researcher provided direct quotes from the participants.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability were two important aspects of the data analysis to ensure credibility and rigor in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To establish dependability, the researcher examined each step of the research process, such as data collection and analysis procedures, to ensure that the result of the study could be replicated by other researchers with similar interest in the topic. It also provided an opportunity for other researchers to do a follow-up study. Confirmability involved the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings. The researcher avoided any personal biases, beliefs, and theological views that could have influenced the data analysis. To establish confirmability, the researcher maintained distinct steps performed throughout the research process, from its inception to its progress and findings. The audit trail included all field notes, sampling decisions, corrections, and findings.

Transferability

Transferability pertained to the extent to which the findings of qualitative research could be applied or extended to different situations or environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It did not mean that the results of the study could be generalized to everyone; it helped the reader to assess the potential relevance and applicability in other researchers beyond the sample study. To ensure

transferability in this research, the researcher provided a rich data analysis, different perspectives of the participants, and self-reflectivity.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain privacy, all documents were kept in a safe and secure area (Flory & Emanuel, 2004). So that participants' identities remained concealed, the researcher substituted pseudonyms. There were no repercussions for participants if they decided to withdraw from the study at any time. These parameters shed light on how to ethically and legally incorporate prayer into the mental health treatment of African Americans. Improved mental health outcomes for African Americans could result from this research on culturally sensitive mental health care.

Summary

The research approach for this study was a qualitative phenomenology study on the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals, particularly on the impact of prayer on psychological well-being. Using purposive sampling, 10 participants were selected. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews via Zoom or in person. The researcher ensured a safe and confidential environment for participants to share their personal experiences related to the study. The researcher identified different themes and patterns from participants' statements during the interview to analyze the data. To ensure the data's credibility, the researcher used direct quotes from the participants. The researcher answered how prayer affected psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals. The researcher followed ethical guidance to protect the participants' rights and privacy throughout the study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this chapter was to delve into the key findings of this study on the impact of prayer on the psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia. This chapter outlines the demographics of the participants who shared their insight during the study. Following this, the chapter presents the thematic analysis of the data, such as theme development, and the emergent themes derived from the participants' interviews. Furthermore, this chapter addresses research question responses and interpretation of the findings. Finally, a concise summary is provided at the end of the chapter.

Participants

The study recruited 10 participants through a purposive method. All participants of the study met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix A):

1. Be 18 years of age or older.
2. Self-identify as an African-American and Christian evangelical.
3. Reside in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia.
4. Be an active member of a Christian evangelical church in Northwest Roanoke for at least 2 years.

The study used these criteria to ensure a homogenous sample of African-American Christian evangelicals living in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia, and possessed a shared religious experience to the study. Individual descriptions of each participant follow (Appendix G shows demographics).

Participant One

Participant One was a 67-year-old married male. He had two daughters and four grandsons. He had been a deacon in his local church for 18 years. He used to work as a former

lineman. He reported that he attended church weekly and actively participated in church services, such as prayer, bible study, worship, and communion service. He reported that he had been of the African evangelical church all his life. He reported that his mother was a Methodist, and his dad was a Baptist growing up. He reported that later on in his life, he accepted Christ and became a Baptist. He had been a member of his local Baptist church since 2004.

Participant Two

Participant Two was a 71-year-old widow who had two grown sons. She was a retired teacher with an associate degree in child preschool education and a degree in recreation. She came from a big family with seven children. She was born and raised in her local church and was baptized at seven years old. She had been part of the African Christian evangelical church all her life. She had been an active member of her local Baptist church for a long time. She had participated in prayer meetings, worship service, bible study, and communion service.

Participant Three

Participant Three was a 70-year-old widow with no children. She had a bachelor's degree in psychology. She had three sisters and three brothers. She was a Baptist and liked to read, listen to music, watch movies, and do crafts. She had been part of the African-American Christian evangelical church all her life and had been an active member of her local Baptist church since 1965. She participated weekly in prayer meetings, bible studies, and worship services.

Participant Four

Participant Four was a 38-year-old female with a four-month-old baby. She worked as an administrative assistant in a community mental health center. She grew up in a church and family of ministers. She grew up Baptist, but now she was part of a non-denominational African-American Christian evangelical church. She had been involved in church activities, such as bible

studies and prayer meetings. She also made the flyers for the church service. She had been in the church community throughout her entire life.

Participant Five

Participant Five was a 70-year-old female pastor of an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) for 17 years. She was born in a multigenerational household. Her great-grandfather was a preacher. She was the fourth generation of AME ministers in her family. She was licensed to preach in May 1944. She received an honorary doctorate from Southern Theological in Lynchburg for community involvement and engagement. She had been an ordained minister for 24 years and had been preaching for 44 years. She had been involved in church activities, such as planting, prayer meetings, Christian programming, and community outreach.

Participant Six

Participant Six was a 39-year-old male pastor of a local Baptist church for 3 years. He had been in the church his entire life. His father was a pastor, and then he became a pastor. He was also a musician and was part of the music ministry in his church growing up. He majored in music for his undergraduate studies, and he earned Master of Arts, Master of Theological Studies, and Master of Divinity degrees. He received a doctorate in ministry from the Lutheran Seminary. He was a pastor in Kentucky prior to coming to Roanoke, Virginia. He had been a pastor in his church for the last 3 years.

Participant Seven

Participant Seven was a 42-year-old male pastor in a non-denominational, African-American Christian evangelical church. He grew up in the church, and his grandfather was an associate pastor. He was baptized when he was seven years old. His grandfather and his

grandmother raised him. He went to military school after high school and returned in 2008. He had been a member of his church since 2010. He had been involved in different activities in the churches and the community.

Participant Eight

Participant Eight was a 67-year-old female retired educator. She had a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in educational administration. She worked for 14 years as a special education teacher and for the Total Action for Progress (TAP). She had been part of her current local Baptist for 40 years. She reported that she joined the church after she graduated from college. She had been part of the finance team in her church for 7 years. She had been involved in different church activities and engaged in the community.

Participant Nine

Participant Nine was a 19-year-old male who was a college student majoring in economics and business. He was born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia. He had an older sibling who was 26 years old. He was an active member of a local AME. He had been part of his local church since elementary school. He had actively participated in church services, such as worship services and prayer meetings.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was a 20-year-old female junior student at James Madison University. She was born and raised in Roanoke, Virginia, and had lived there her entire life. She was an active member of a local AME. She was studying communication with a concentration in cultural communication with an honors minor. She worked in the admissions office at her university. She grew up in the church her entire life. She was baptized when she was 12 years old. She had been involved in youth ministry at her church.

Results

The current study aimed to investigate three key research questions:

1. How do African-American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being?
2. In what ways do African-American Christian evangelicals perceive prayer as impacting their coping mechanisms during times of stress or adversity?
3. How do cultural and religious beliefs within the African-American Christian evangelical community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological wellness?

In order to explore these research questions and gain insight into participants' experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being, a semi-structured interview format was conducted. The subsequent sections address the thematic analysis of the data, key findings, and their relation to each question.

Theme Development

Participants were recruited in their local church in Northwest Roanoke. The researcher contacted church leaders and informed them about the research, asking their permission to approach their congregant to be part of the research study. The researcher first screened each participant to see if they met the basic criteria to be part of the research. Once the participant was determined as eligible, the researcher gave them the informed consent form to sign (see Appendix E) and return within 1 week. Next, the researcher contacted them to set up the interview either through Zoom or in person for participants who did not have video capability or preferred to meet in person. The researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews via Zoom or in person, asking 15 open-ended questions.

Throughout the research process, the researcher took rigorous steps to mitigate personal biases that could have affected the data accuracy. The researcher used Zoom transcription and TurboScribe services to transcribe all the interviews verbatim to ensure capture of the participants' exact words. Upon completing the interviews, the researcher carefully reviewed the transcripts and audio recordings. This step allowed him to make necessary corrections to ensure the accuracy of the data. By reading the transcripts several times, it helped to identify initial patterns and recurring themes. An email was sent to each participant with their transcripts to verify or clarify any inaccuracies or make any minor corrections in their transcripts.

Once the researcher verified and finalized the transcripts, he used NVivo software to import the transcripts for qualitative analysis. To categorize the data from the participant transcripts, the researcher employed a coding method, which was a process of labeling and organizing the data to identify different themes and how they relate. This coding method allowed the researcher to see themes that emerged naturally from the data and how they were connected to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks. Codes were used to represent significant concepts and ideas in the data analysis. The NVivo software helped to manage and organize the codes, which made it easier to track and analyze different recurring themes from participants' interviews.

In the last step, the researcher reviewed the themes derived from the data analysis to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' lived experiences and perspectives. To further deepen connections, the researcher examined different relationships between themes and subthemes. He also checked and rechecked the data and initial findings to ensure consistency and reliability in the coding. By going through all the steps, the researcher was able to find robust themes that provided a good reflection of the participants' lived experiences.

Themes

Three primary themes were revealed through the data analysis, which reflected the participants' experiences with the role and impact of prayer on their psychological well-being. The first theme was personal growth through prayer, with the subthemes of frequency of prayer, types of prayer, and impact of prayers. Participants mentioned how they played an important role in their daily lives by highlighting morning and specific prayers during times of need. The second theme was emotional support, with the subthemes of using coping mechanisms and finding peace and comfort. Participants reported using prayer as a coping mechanism and for navigating life challenges during stressful times. The third theme was cultural influence, encompassing the subthemes of cultural expression, communal prayer, and community engagement. These themes demonstrated how prayer impacted participants, highlighting its personal, communal, and great psychological significance. See Table 1 for a list of themes, subthemes, and codes (see Appendix G for the number of coding references for each theme).

Table 1

List of Themes, Subthemes, and Codes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Personal Growth	Frequency of Prayers Types of Prayers Impact of Prayers	Daily (30), Thanksgiving (22), Petition (20), Confession (12), Intercession (25), Strength and Resilience (18)
Emotional Support	Coping Mechanisms Peace and Comfort	Seeking Comfort (28), Cope with Stress (34), Inner Peace (31), Reduce Anxiety (26)
Cultural Influence	Cultural Expression Communal Prayer Community Engagement	Traditions and Practices (15), Prayer Groups (18), Outreach Programs (17), Prayer Walks (12), Support Networks (20)

Personal Growth

The data that derived from the interviews highlighted that prayer played an important role in personal growth and spiritual development in the participants' lives. Participants reported

different aspects that encompassed their personal growth through prayer, such as the frequency of prayer, the types of prayers, and how it significantly impacted their overall well-being.

Through daily prayer, participants reported having a deeper sense of self-awareness and spiritual maturity. They also described how certain types of prayers contributed to their personal development, such as thanksgiving prayer, intercessory prayers, and confession prayers. The data showed that prayer was not only used as a coping mechanism, but also as a motivating factor for personal growth and spiritual enrichment.

Frequency of Prayers. Several participants from the study emphasized that prayer was an integral part of their lives to communicate with God. Participants reported praying in the morning and evening daily. Participant 2 reported that she prayed all the time: “I don't know how anybody else gets to God, but I pray all the time.” This illustrated how prayer played an essential role in her life and was used as a means to communicate with God. The practice of daily prayer as a means to communicate with God was echoed among several participants in the study.

Participant 2 also highlighted her daily prayer routine:

Mainly, my prayer is based off what's happened for the day. Usually, when I wake up, it's just so I pray, so I'll have a good day, or that everybody's protected and covered, while I'm not around, that they're good. Then, when I go to work, I do my daily devotional, and I just pray, again, for a good day, and to bless my mind state, and my, and my being. And then, lunchtime, I pray again for my food, and most of the time, I see the baby on my lunch break, so, you know, I pray for her, my mom, that they're good when I come back to work. Yeah, that's good.

Participant 4 reported: “Personally, I pray daily, sometimes multiple times a day.”

Participant 5 not only prayed daily, but she also quantified the number of times she spent in

prayer: "I pray about 25 hours a week in prayer." This illustrated a high level of dedication and commitment to prayer. It also underlined how prayer was the ultimate factor in their daily life. Participant 7 strongly emphasized the routine of prayer in their life: "I try to at least thank God for the new day before I even put my feet on the ground. I usually wake up around 6:30, and it's kind of a quick prayer."

Types of Prayers. The data collected from the participants revealed how prayer was interwoven into their daily lives and described the different types of prayers that they practiced for their personal and spiritual growth, such as petition prayers, intercession prayers, thanksgiving prayers, and confession prayers.

Intercessory Prayer. Intercessory prayer provided an avenue for psychological well-being in this study. Participants shifted their personal concerns to intercede before God to the needs of others. This type of prayer helped them to connect with others' suffering, which gave them a sense of purpose and life satisfaction. They also found healing, guidance, and transformation through intercessory prayer. The idea of interceding to God on behalf of others was very significant among participants. Participant 1 described how he interceded on behalf of his children as a parent:

Everything changes when you have children of your own because the responsibility of raising them and now, I've got to get my child to church, to Sunday school. I've got to get them to school. I know the outside world has an influence on it, but I know I've got an influence on it, too. So, I'm going to pray for them. I'm going to pray with them. You have to get notes because, remember, I told you there's a hesitation to tell your parents everything. But sometimes I find myself forced to pray for people, especially if it's

somebody for whatever reason has irritated me, or I see them irritating someone else. It's hard to pray for that person but that's what the Bible says, pray.

Participant 8 shared a personal story on how she interceded on behalf of loved ones struggling with substance use and the transformation that occurred after this prayer:

I'm gonna tell you, my husband is a recovered alcoholic. He has been sober now for, I don't know, 15 or more years. I'm not good with time, but it's been a long time. During the period of his drinking, he always worked; he was always a provider. He always paid; it was never that I had to step up because of him. It was just the effects of the alcohol and things like that. One day, I had been praying for him to be sober, and I told God, "He's yours." I did not take it back. When I gave him to God, that meant I didn't pray about him anymore, nor did I complain about his actions or his behaviors. I turned it over to God. Within a week, he was in treatment for the last and final time, and he's been sober ever since.

Participant 6 highlighted the psychological benefits of intercessory prayer, which shifted focus away from personal problems:

A lot of times, when we pray for others, it does take our minds off of what we're going through. I believe that's why, even when we look at the model prayer, it's not a lot about us; it's about God's will being done.

He continued:

I would also say that prayer of intercession as well. I think, well, I feel, I believe that having people I trust and sharing what's going on and asking them to pray, I've also seen God move through that as well. In terms of being able to share with people what's going

on and seeking, or just asking them to partner in prayer, I think that has been helpful as well.

Participant 2 highlighted a poignant example of intercessory prayer:

We communicate by phone and texting. And he texted us all and told us that he had a stroke. He was in the hospital, and it affected his left side. He couldn't walk, and he was left-handed. And he couldn't walk. He couldn't write his name. It didn't affect his thinking or speaking. And he was in the hospital for about a month. And we just said we're going to send our prayers, and you're going to be okay. You're going to go and send our prayers. You're going to be okay. And he's coming along tremendously.

Participant 1 demonstrated that the act of praying for others was a selfless dedication:

I find myself praying for people in the hospital, that I've got to be attentive to mom, because if anything changes, I need to be right there. But you want to go and pray with these people. So, if you can't pray with them, you pray for them.

Participant 5 continued to emphasize the communal aspect of intercessory prayer:

How can we go into the community of a loved one that somebody's been killed or something tragic has happened if we don't take the power of prayer with us? That's our greatest weapon is the power of prayer. Because when you come in believing, it'll help other people believe it's still going to be all right. So, when we do community prayer has to go in front of us and with us.

Petition. Participants in this study highlighted how they used petitionary prayer as an essential tool to ask God directly to intervene in their lives, which had been very beneficial for their psychological well-being. They sincerely relied on God through petitionary prayer and knew that He would satisfy their needs and wants. Participant 1 described the intense emotional

involvement of petitionary prayer when addressing God: “It got to be where sometimes you would pray yourself to tears because it was so emotionally involved with the prayer. You wanted God to move on whatever the petition was, and so it has always been around.” He further mentioned the presence of the Holy Spirit through petitionary prayer and finding a sense of relief through this type of prayer:

He's petitioning God through you, and you feel the Holy Spirit, because you can shake yourself up, like I said, pray till you bring yourself to tears, you're getting close there, but when you get to the point to where the Holy Spirit is actually doing the talking, but it's coming out of your mouth, because I've had people say, “Thank you for that prayer,” that “I needed that confirmation”, and I don't know what they're talking about, and they said, “Do you know what you said?” and I said, “I remember how it started.”

Participant 3 emphasized the importance of trusting God when petitioning:

I do believe that you take it to God, and let him handle it. But she used to tell me all the time to stop telling Him to do stuff, and then don't trust Him to do it. And I said, “Well, sometimes, though, I feel like God wants you to come back to Him to let Him know how sincere you are about stuff.” So, you cannot take it to God. It seems like you petition to God and then tell Him, “Hey, this is what's going on in my life, and I want you to take over.” So instead of you trying to resolve your problem, you let God handle it for you.

Participant 1 provided insight: “We petition God because we want it fixed, but we already got an idea how we want to fix it. Even when we're praying in gratitude, it's almost a bragging way of saying, ‘Look what God did to me.’” Participant 1 emphasized the need to yield desire to God when making a petition. For Participant 2, petitionary prayer was a direct and intimate conversation with God. Overall, the participants illustrated that a petition was more than a simple

request to God to meet their needs and wants. It fostered psychological well-being by cultivating trust in God's ultimate control.

Thanksgiving Prayer. Participants from the study described thanksgiving prayer as an act of expressing gratitude to God. For them, gratitude was not just for the material blessings they received, but also for His consistent presence and guidance throughout their lives. The act of thanksgiving fostered a sense of contentment and well-being. Participants acknowledged God's role in their lives and the good things that they experienced from Him. Participant 1 reported being grateful for God's blessings in his life: "When things are going well, there's a prayer of gratefulness, but it's almost a grateful prayer. You've recognized who God is and what he's done, and it's a joyous sending up." Participant 3 highlighted the necessity of acknowledging God's blessings from the beginning to the end of the day:

Yeah, I do a prayer of thanksgiving each morning. When I first get up, I do all my thanksgiving. But during the day, most of the time, it is a prayer of request or inviting Him to come into certain situations. And at night, I do thanksgiving prayer because I thank Him for getting me through the day.

Participant 9 expanded on the reason to engage in thanksgiving prayer and deepened its understanding. Participant 9 also expressed gratitude toward God for His daily provisions:

I feel like it's important to give thanks to Him because, at the end of the day, He gives you everything. He wakes you up, puts the food on the table, saves your health, and everything. I feel like everything you have in your life is a form of Jesus giving it to you. So, I think it's important to be thankful, and just thank Him. I thank Him every time I pray because I know I'd be nothing without Him.

Confession Prayer. Confession prayer was another type of prayer highlighted in the data. This practice consisted of self-reflection, forgiveness, repentance, and admission of wrongdoing to God. It fostered spiritual and emotional well-being among participants. Participant 10 explained that confession prayer allowed openness and self-reflection:

I feel like I need to say about that and not only confessing how I feel about the situation but how I think what my role is in the situation. I feel like I can like fully let that go because I feel like a lot of times when we're just like talking versus praying, like you're maybe not saying everything you feel like you're responsible for because you feel like, "Oh, I don't want to be judged or I don't want to be like, I don't want to say too much," but when praying alone and confessing, I feel like that's where I'm able to let it all out.

Impact of Prayers. This subtheme highlighted how the practice of prayer impacted participants' personal growth in fostering resilience and strength and enhancing their sense of purpose. The data revealed that prayer gave participants a sense of hope and assurance when they were going through life challenges. For instance, Participant 2 stated:

I've had challenges throughout my life. If it weren't for me talking to God, praying to God, I don't think I'd be living. I really don't. I've been through a divorce with two small kids. I kept my home and kept them fed. They may not have had everything they wanted, but they had everything we needed. We were never without a home, a roof over our heads, clothes on our backs, food on the table, and a car for me to drive to work. It's been hard, but I've been blessed. I've been through three major surgeries, and God brought me through that. If it weren't for that and my family supporting me and us supporting each other, I don't know what I would have done. Prayer makes you stronger. It does. Trials

and tribulations make you stronger, too, if you have a connection with God, and that is through prayer.

She added:

I just sit down quietly and have a little talk with God. Tell Him all that's going on, and He reassures me it's going to be all right. If you don't have that talk with Jesus, I don't know how you can go on.

Participant 4 described how prayer gave her strength to handle an unexpected event:

Since I was eight, I was telling people, "I don't want to have kids. I don't want to be a mom." Honestly, when I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, that prayer switched. It was like, "Hey, you may be saying what you don't want, but the Lord's like, hey, I need you to do this. This is your mission. You're going to be a mom. I trust you."

When asked the same question about the impact of prayer, Participant 5 shared:

Sometimes, you can be on the edge because things are so difficult, but if you steady yourself in prayer and talk to God, just like I'm talking to you, saying, "Hey God, you know I'm doing the best I can, and I need some help," God knows that. You can ask for help with a specific issue or just help to get through the storm.

She highlighted the profound impact on helping her to be strong and resilient in difficult times.

Emotional Support

Participants underscored how prayer played a pivotal role on emotional and psychological well-being in the lives of African-American Christian evangelicals. Through their experiences, they reported that prayer gave them a source of comfort, serving as a coping strategy and a means of finding peace and comfort. Prayer gave them a sense of stability and tranquility, even through challenging times.

Coping Mechanisms. Participants described prayer in this study as a vital tool for enhancing their psychological well-being. They reported using prayer to reduce their stress, anxiety, and depression. Prayer was more than a mere connection with God; it provided comfort during challenging times. Participant 1 shared a personal story on how he utilized prayers as a coping mechanism to deal with work-related issues:

I was at work and found myself between a rock and a hard place. There were people who did not want me in my position. I'm five foot six, African-American, with a high school education, and over the years, I had worked my way up in our company. By God's blessing, I made it to the first level of management, becoming a foreman or supervisor. However, many people wanted that position for themselves for various reasons and did not want me there. There were many times I was set up, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, to look bad in front of the supervisors above me. Usually, when I found out about these setups, I was heartbroken, but I would pray. After praying, I felt better because it was no longer about me but about what God had for me. If God wanted me to have that position, then that's how it would be because God has the final say. If it wasn't meant for me, I would congratulate whoever got it. Most of the time, it was usually something where someone set me up to make me look bad in front of my supervisors. There were several instances, but in each one, I would pray.

He continued to stress the importance of prayer first when going through life's difficulties:

Prayer is where you go first. I mean, you've got to; reality is, everybody's going to have trouble. Everybody's going to have stress. Everybody's got problems. When you get to measuring who's a bigger or whatever, I mean, it doesn't matter. You're going to go

through, you're either going to go through believing in God or you're going to go through of your own accord.

He added that when people do not use prayer as the first step, they usually get into more problems: “And the people who go through on accord are usually suicide victims. They're usually people who fall into drug addictions, alcohol addictions, or whatever the flavor of the month is. They're going to be deterred from moving forward.” When Participant 1 was asked how he utilized prayer to cope with stress and life difficulties, he shared another personal story of God's intervention through prayer when he was ill:

I remember when I was sick, real sick, I mean really sick, and I would lay up agonizing over it, agonizing over it, and then I finally got to the point where I was driven to prayer. You see, because I'd agonized enough, and once you start praying over stuff, then you realize, okay, I feel better now that I've got it out, so it is the psychotherapy that you need when you're serious about it, because we can always pray, do that prayer, you know, woe is me, Lord, they used to call it fire-engine Christians. I'm on fire, Lord, put me out, put me out, Lord, and then when He does put you out, then you don't pray anymore, but the thing is, the anxieties that you have, the troubles that you have that you internalize and you don't tell nobody about, they lead to physical illness, they lead to depression, they lead to stress, they lead to coronaries, they lead to parts of the body rebelling against itself, so by praying, you've lowered your blood pressure, because you've got it out. By praying, God has granted you the favor of not having that heart attack that you were driving yourself to, yet the outside world may have presented the problem, but if you can relax in it, in the midst of it.

Participant 2 reported using prayer as a source of strength and resilience through various life challenges:

It makes me stronger. It really does. I've been through a lot, but I don't dwell on that. You know, I've had challenges, you know, throughout my life hood. And, and I, you know, if it wasn't for me talking to God, praying to God, you know, I just don't think that you're living. I really don't. I've been through a divorce with two small kids... You know, I've been through three major surgeries. God brought me through that.

Participant 3 discussed how prayer helped in making big life decisions:

When I have to make decisions, big, sometimes even small, I pray on them, and sometimes, I'll tell people I need 3 days. And they say, "Why do you need 3 days?" I say, "I gotta pray on it for 3 days." And they say, "What?" I said, "I gotta pray on it for 3 days." I don't do that for everything, but some things I just feel like needs more prayer time than just to sit and say, "Let me pray on this right now." But I just feel like it needs more prayer. More prayer. So, there are things that need a little bit of prayer, and there are things that definitely need more prayer.

Participant 4 described the role of prayer in enhancing psychological well-being and discernment:

I pray daily for my own mental health, and plus for my own discernment, because sometimes without the prayer, you can't see the attack, spiritual attacks coming against you, and so I always pray for my own discernment, so that when I meet people, first off, that I impact them in a good way, but also so that if they're not here for my benefit, that I can see that, and that helps me mentally, because I thrive off being a blessing to others, so if I'm not going to be able to be a blessing to you, I need to know that in return that you're

not going to be a blessing, be able to receive this blessing, so I can move on and help somebody else, and that helps me giving back to the community, keeps my mind sane to be able to function with these teenage nieces and nephews in the community, and to be able to put in positive energy and prayer for my baby. I like that.

Participant 4 added that prayer must be the first step in evaluating any problematic situation:

When something happens, the first thing I do is pray about it, and then prayer helps me sit down and meditate on what's the, what's the other side of the situation, you know?

Like, what's on the other side, what's the positive out of it? Because it's like, okay, it may be stressful, I may be trying, but you gotta find the positive in there somewhere, and then focus on that. Because sometimes if you don't pray about it first, you're gonna think of the negative stuff first, you're gonna think of everything that could happen, worst part of it. But, then you got to sit down, meditate, and pray on it, because it's like, what's, what's the lesson here? What is it that you really want me to see out of this situation, or learn from this situation?

Participant 5 provided a vivid account of using prayer to cope with the stress of a family member's surgery:

I'm gonna give you something that's fresh off the press. Two days ago, my brother had brain surgery, 6-hour surgery. Okay. It was most stressful. He is my baby brother. He has no wife, has no children. I got so stressed. I picked up a cup of coffee, and my hand was just shaking, just like that. I've never seen that amount of stress. That's before we get to the hospital. I do my deep breathing, and I said, "I need to pray" because my flesh was reacting to the stress of what could happen and reacting to some family stressors. I'm shaking like a leaf. I've never had any incident where my hand was shaking like that,

never. But that says to me that I was very stressed. Okay. So, after I did my deep breathing, my square breathing, I can do square breathing, you know. I did my square breathing, and I said, “Lord, I need you. I know you're handling me spiritually, but I need you to handle my flesh. My flesh is very upset about this. This is a life-or-death situation. So, Lord, I need you. Come Holy Spirit.” I'm telling you, it wasn't 15 minutes until all the shaking had gone away and I said in peace with God.

Participant 5 also added that prayer can cause someone to be resilient in the face of a difficult situation:

It gives you that resiliency that you need, because I know that's an external circumstance, but I serve a God that's internal and external. My internal God will influence the external circumstances, so it lets me do the impossible. What people think is impossible that I do, I do it because I talk to God the Father, and He steadies me and guides me. The Holy Spirit shows me the way to get where I have to go. That comes through prayer.

Participant 6 reported that prayer can help in managing anxiety and depressive symptoms:

I have been diagnosed with anxiety. One thing I've realized is that whenever I spend time in prayer, it helps me become more focused on whatever the assignment is. Even though there's still that feeling of being burdened by something I have to do, prayer helps me to become focused. I think it gives me a sense of energy and the desire to follow through with it. For instance, I may go into prayer feeling downtrodden, but after praying, I have this sense of “I can do this.” If I was depressed or dealing with anxiety before prayer, a lot of times I don't feel as depressed afterward. Prayer helps me deal with the struggles of pastoral ministry, which is unlike any other job.

Participant 6 also discussed using prayer as a coping strategy to endure life challenges and fulfill God's will:

I understand that some situations are presented or ordained to help develop me as a person and a minister. I understand that challenging and hard times are necessary. In prayer, I ask God to help me see Him in whatever the obstacle is so that I can grow in a way that He desires. The normal human response is to ask God to take us out of difficult moments, to say, "God, take me out of this. I don't want to deal with this, take it away." I've learned that I shouldn't always use prayer to ask God to get me out of situations. Instead, my prayer is, "God, if there are things I have to go through, help me gain wisdom so I'll know how to maneuver through this situation and future situations as well."

Participant 10 reported using prayer as an effective coping mechanism to help them navigate challenging times:

This is really recent. Going into my upcoming fall year, I had nowhere to live at all. You can imagine how incredibly stressful that was with everything being so expensive. During that specific time, we prayed and prayed, and now I have somewhere to live. That's one of the most recent things where I've definitely utilized prayer. It was super stressful to the point where I couldn't even think about it; sometimes, I didn't even want to think about it. But in that moment, when I couldn't think about it because I was so stressed, I decided to pray to God. I said, "Hey, you understand the situation. You see what I'm going through. Please put me in your best interest. Wherever you want me to be, that's where I want to be." That definitely reduced my stress level.

Participant 10 also used prayer to regulate strong emotions in challenging times:

I feel like I utilize prayer to not cry. Not only just to not cry, but also to avoid getting angry. It's hard sometimes to not get really, really frustrated and want to punch a wall, curse someone out, or just break down. I use prayer in those challenging times to prevent myself from becoming someone I know I'm not—a violent person who snaps at others or loses control.

Participant 9 used prayer to get mental clarity while he was going through challenging times during his freshman year in college:

My grades were not as good. I was playing football, which I've always wanted to do at a D1 level, but my grades weren't good, and I was really having a hard time mentally. But as I prayed on it, and as time went by, the vision just got clearer. It opened up, and I realized that I should stay. This is the path that God wants me to take right now.

Peace and Comfort. Participants from this study highlighted how prayer provided them a sense of peace and comfort during challenging times. Participant 3 reported how she found peace through prayer after the death of her husband: “When my husband died, and my aunt died right there, back-to-back, I prayed for God to give me peace in both situations because I was, like I said, I was going through health challenges at the time.” Participant 5 described the ability of prayer to bring peace and tranquility in someone:

Prayer is so important. It is. That prayer, because it calms you and it calms the other person too. Prayer, psychologically, just look at this psychologically. It calms people down enough so that they can have a good experience in the church. Some people come to church nervous.

Participant 5 also provided an example of how she found peace and comfort through prayer:

Sometimes I'm driving on the road, and a storm will come up. I don't like driving in the rain. And then the Spirit of the Lord says, "We got this." It gives you that comfort. When you pray, there's a level of security that comes into your mindset that prevents you from kirking out. You know, I have never kirked out in any situation because I use prayer.

Participant 6 reported listening to God's guidance through prayer to provide a sort of emotional relief and encouragement:

So, there are moments when I'm praying that I'll start to think about certain situations. And, so, while I'm praying, I feel burdened. But as a result of prayer and waiting to hear from God, it's not always an internal, audible response. Sometimes it's a feeling of peace. And, also, there's been moments where there's a feeling of joy. So, after I prayed, after I just took out the time to be still and try to listen to or for His voice and guidance, then I often feel a sense of renewal and encouragement.

Participant 7 reported that prayer gave him a sense of peace and helped manage his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-related symptoms as a Veteran:

I'm actually a Veteran. I deal with times where I struggle with PTSD. One of the main things I try to do is get into prayer as quickly as possible. I'm not going to say I've perfected this yet, but I know that when I get into those funks where I'm down or agitated, praying helps. Even if it doesn't immediately give me the emotional shift I want, it reminds me that there's more than just what's going on right then. It reminds me that God must have something planned out. We say it a lot in our community: "Pressure creates diamonds." Sometimes, you have moments where you have to go through certain

things, and it can be an attack on the mind. I've recognized, especially at night, I've had times when I've woken up startled for whatever reason. When I pray, I feel a sense of peace come over me, and I can get back to sleep. There have been moments when I prayed and found myself still up, trying to figure it out. But I feel that sense of peace, and it eases my mind. I may not have found a solution yet, but it eased my mind enough to know that I've at least spoken to the Creator, and if something needs to be put in place, He'll get the answer to me somehow, some way."

Participant 7 also emphasized how prayer can be used as a tool for emotional regulation and fostering psychological resilience:

It definitely brings me a sense of peace. It takes a situation that is seemingly overwhelming and calms me down, preventing me from overreacting. It also gives me the courage to react or step out when needed. It's definitely major. It's a lot easier for me to handle a hard situation and speak to God and just wait to calm me down, especially considering the way I believe and have seen God move before. I call it hero syndrome—I have the tendency to jump out there, and make something happen every time. But as I mature and learn to trust in God more, prayer reminds me to slow down sometimes. I noticed when I do pray, it keeps me from being impulsive and just going with what I think I should do. That's definitely something that has helped me because I've always been that impulsive person who goes with the first thing that comes to mind. Not in a reckless way, but just thinking the first thing has to be the right answer.

Participant 10 mentioned that prayer brings a sense of peace and reassurance through difficult times:

When I pray or talk to God, I feel more calm and confident that my mental health won't deteriorate and negatively impact my life. It gives me a light at the end of the tunnel, even in my darkest hours, because there have been many dark hours. I feel like prayer definitely affects the end of an episode or breakdown. As a college student, I've had multiple breakdowns. Even through the worst adversity, once I pray, I feel such a peace and presence that reassures me everything will be okay, even when I can't see it. And that's one of the best things because when you can't see it, you don't know what's going to happen. But with prayer, I feel like I did something about it.

Participant 8 highlighted that prayer served as catalyst to find peace in the midst of anxiety:

Well, I think it grounds you, you know, because we all get anxiety sometimes. We get anxious and worried about a situation, and your mind can really run away with you.

Those thoughts that you don't want to think of, whatever might take place. But then you have to stop, get still, and pray. You know, talk to God, and you get a sense of peace. So, I think it grounds you. It keeps you grounded and keeps you in tune with God's will, you know, His way. It just grounds you. That's just the best way to keep you grounded.

Cultural Influence

Prayer has had a significant role in the culture of African-American Christian evangelicals. Prayer has been more than a religious practice; it has been a communication tool to make an impact in the community. This theme highlighted three subthemes: cultural expression, communal practice of prayer, and community engagement through prayer. Participants reported that prayer influenced their lives and the community that they were part of.

Cultural Expression. This subtheme emphasized how cultural traditions and practices communicated how participants prayed. Participant 10 stated:

I feel like it can communicate towards the community because within the culture, I feel like if you see somebody praying, you're not going to come up to them and be like, "Hey, hey, hey, what are you doing?" Within our specific culture, you understand that when someone is showing signs like bowing their head, closing their eyes, or raising their hands, it communicates to anyone around that they are praying.

Her statement demonstrated the level of respect for prayer, and it translated within the African American-Christian evangelicals. Participant 10 continued: "It communicates to the culture that you are a Christian who prays and believes in the power of prayer." When Participant 8 was asked the same question about their cultural and religious beliefs about prayer within their community, she stated:

I think it gets generational. My generation may see it as an anchor, but the younger generation may not view it with the same strength or belief. As they go through life's experiences, hopefully, they get grounded and know that Christ is the anchor.

Her statement highlighted generational perspective about prayer. For this participant, prayer was more significant for the older generation than the new generation. Participant 3 reported praying, as needed, even though the culture of the church told her to pray:

You know, some people say pray three times a day: morning, noon, and night. Of course, you know, you pray each time you eat, but I pray as needed, and sometimes that might be 20 times a day. Sometimes it might just be three times a day, but even if it's a one-sentence prayer, I pray all during the day.

Communal Prayer. This subtheme underlined the integration of collective prayer practices that influenced participants' individual prayer practices. When Participant 5 was asked

to share if there were any particular teachings or traditions within her community that influenced how she prayed, she stated:

In the AME church, we don't do anything till we pray. We're not talking, we're not quoting no scripture. We're not shaking anybody's hand. We're gonna come in here, and the first thing we're gonna do is lift up prayer.

She continued to emphasize how her traditions influenced her prayer practices:

When I wake up, what am I doing? Praying from the time I get up. And when I go to bed at night, the last thing I say is "Thank you, Jesus." So, I'm probably in continuous prayer all the time, but in AME tradition, we teach more about prayer.

When Participant 6 was asked the same question, he stated:

So, I really feel like that's something that many, whether it's Baptist, Pentecostal, you know, African-American, evangelicals hold to, is that if you ask anything in His name, He'll do it, you know. And, so, I believe He can do all things, but if it's not according to His will, it's not in alignment with His will, then it's not going to be done.

Community Engagement. Participants from the study reported engaging in various prayer activities in the community. Through community engagement, they found a sense of togetherness, support, and spiritual fulfillment. The emotional support and the sense of belonging through the practice of community engagement was very beneficial for participants' psychological well-being. Participant 1 described how prayer walks strengthened their spiritual lives and community connection:

We've done prayer walks in my church to try to invite the people who are directly in that neighborhood, two, three-block radius. We walk around, pray on each corner, and for those who are outside, we ask them if we can pray with them, give them information on

the church to try to get the community back involved with the church, because there was a preacher who told me, everybody in the community may not be a part of the church, but the church really needs to be a part of everybody in the community. Outreach is important to get out into the community.

Participant 6 shared how his community utilized collective prayer in response to crises: "With the increase in gun violence, I've seen people organize prayer vigils. At these events, we often hear that prayer is necessary for us to get through this. We need to come together and pray." He continued, "Sometimes God wants us to be the answer to the prayers that we pray." Participant 5 underscored the integration of prayer into community gatherings: "Many times we have community gatherings, and prayer may encompass only a tenth of it. We need to take the power of prayer with us into the community because it's our greatest weapon." Participant 3 discussed being involved in different activities that her church was doing in the community to improve people's lives:

We go through the community sometimes and interact with the people that live in this community. We do this street, we do two blocks, the next street, and so we go over four streets. And we do two blocks in each street talking to the people that live, having prayer with them.

Participant 4 stressed the need to not only pray for the community, but to also help them through action: "You can't just pray for the community and not act. Prayer is important, but we also need to provide tangible help like feeding the homeless and giving shelter." She continued:

Not only do we have to pray for the community, but we also have to be more involved.

You can't just pray for the community and not act on trying to better the community.

Yeah, because prayer is only going to get you so far. You got to be out there, like, feeding

the homeless. You got to be out there giving shelter. You got to be out there providing resources. You got to let the community also know that, “Hey, if you need something, we are here.” Not the church, but the people of the church, because the church is just the building, but the people have to be out there. You have to show your face.

Participant 3 embraced the idea of supporting the community through prayer and meeting their needs: "We go through the community, interact with people, and have prayer with them. We go out there and knock on people's doors, offering prayer and support."

Research Question Responses

In this section, the researcher analyzes the primary themes and subthemes that derived from the research questions. This qualitative study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do African-American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being?
2. In what ways do African-American Christian evangelicals perceive prayer as impacting their coping mechanisms during times of stress or adversity?
3. How do cultural and religious beliefs within the African-American Christian evangelical community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological wellness?

How do African American-Christian evangelicals describe their lived experiences with prayer in relation to their psychological well-being?

The first theme, Personal Growth, explored the ways that prayer influenced participants' personal development and psychological well-being. Three subthemes resulted from this theme: frequency of prayer, types of prayer, and impact of prayer. The data demonstrated that participants who engaged in daily prayer practices maintained their mental states and improved

their psychological well-being. The regular routine of prayer was how they got through life. For instance, Participant 2 shared:

Mainly, my prayer is based off what's happened for the day. Usually, when I wake up, it's just so I pray, so I'll have a good day, or that everybody's protected and covered, while I'm not around, that they're good. Then, when I go to work, I do my daily devotional, and I just pray, again, for a good day, and to bless my mind state, and my, and my being. And then, lunchtime, I pray again for my food, and most of the time, I see the baby on my lunch break, so, you know, I pray for her, my mom, that they're good when I come back to work.

They also talked about different types of prayer that played a vital role in their psychological well-being, such as intercessory, petitionary, thanksgiving, and confession. Each type of prayer had a specific purpose in the contribution to their psychological well-being.

Participant 8 reported how she interceded on behalf of her husband who was an alcoholic:

I'm gonna tell you, my husband is a recovered alcoholic. He has been sober now for, I don't know, 15 or more years. I'm not good with time, but it's been a long time. During the period of his drinking, he always worked; he was always a provider. He always paid; it was never that I had to step up because of him. It was just the effects of the alcohol and things like that. One day, I had been praying for him to be sober, and I told God, "He's yours." I did not take it back. When I gave him to God, that meant I didn't pray about him anymore, nor did I complain about his actions or his behaviors. I turned it over to God. Within a week, he was in treatment for the last and final time, and he's been sober ever since.

Through the participants' life experiences, the data showed that prayer had a profound impact on their personal growth in helping them navigate life challenges and enhancing their psychological well-being.

In what ways do African-American Christian evangelicals perceive prayer as impacting their coping mechanisms during times of stress or adversity?

The second theme, Emotional Support, addressed this research question by analyzing how prayer served as a coping mechanism and a source of peace and comfort through the participants' life experiences. There were two subthemes derived from this theme: coping skills and peace and comfort. Participants reported using prayer as an effective coping mechanism to manage emotional stress and life challenges. Participants described how the use of prayer helped them to be mentally and emotionally stable. For instance, Participant 4 described how she used prayer to improve her psychological well-being:

I pray daily for my own mental health, and plus for my own discernment, because sometimes without the prayer, you can't see the attack, spiritual attacks coming against you, and so I always pray for my own discernment, so that when I meet people, first off, that I impact them in a good way, but also, so that if they're not here for my benefit, that I can see that, and that helps me mentally, because I thrive off being a blessing to others, so if I'm not going to be able to be a blessing to you, I need to know that in return that you're not going to be a blessing, be able to receive this blessing, so I can move on and help somebody else, and that helps me giving back to the community, keeps my mind sane to be able to function with these teenage nieces and nephews in the community, and to be able to put in positive energy and prayer for my baby. I like that.

Prayer also provided a sense of peace and comfort. Participants reported feeling secure and supported during stressful situations. They also found tranquility of mind in the midst of their life turmoil. Participant 6 shared:

So, there are moments when I'm praying that I'll start to think about certain situations.

And, so, while I'm praying, I feel burdened. But as a result of prayer and waiting to hear from God, it's not always an internal, audible response. Sometimes, it's a feeling of peace.

And, also, there's been moments where there's a feeling of joy. So, after I prayed, after I just took out the time to be still and try to listen to or for His voice and guidance, then I often feel a sense of renewal and encouragement.

How do cultural and religious beliefs within the African-American Christian evangelical community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological wellness?

The third theme, Cultural Influence, answered this research question by examining the cultural and the community influence of prayer in the lived experiences of the participants. The subthemes highlighted cultural expression, communal prayer, and community engagement. Participants utilized prayer collectively to support and unite their community through prayer walks and worship services. For instance, Participant 4 highlighted the importance of being involved in the community and praying for others:

Not only do we have to pray for the community, but we also have to be more involved.

You can't just pray for the community and not act on trying to better the community.

Yeah, because prayer is only going to get you so far. You got to be out there, like, feeding the homeless. You got to be out there giving shelter. You got to be out there providing resources. You got to let the community also know that, hey, if you need something, we

are here. Not the church, but the people of the church, because the church is just the building, but the people have to be out there. You have to show your face.

Participant 6 stressed the importance of praying and supporting the community, due to the increase of gang violence: "With the increase in gun violence, I've seen people organize prayer vigils. At these events, we often hear that prayer is necessary for us to get through this. We need to come together and pray." He continued, "Sometimes God wants us to be the answer to the prayers that we pray." Participant 5 underscored the integration of prayer into community gatherings: "Many times, we have community gatherings, and prayer may encompass only a tenth of it. We need to take the power of prayer with us into the community because it's our greatest weapon." Prayer was also more than an individual activity or religious practice; it was something embedded in the community to address social issues and foster solidarity. Participants underlined that the rituals of prayer shaped not only their personal lives, but also the lives of those around them.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the lived experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals regarding the role of prayer in their psychological well-being. Participants shared their lived experiences by answering 15 questions during semi-structured interviews. The data analysis revealed three primary themes: Personal Growth, Emotional Support, and Cultural Influence. The Personal Growth theme included three subthemes: frequency of prayer, prayer types and impact of prayer. Participants described how prayer contributed to their personal development and enhanced their psychological well-being. The Emotional Support theme was divided into two subthemes: coping skills and peace and comfort. Participants reported that during stressful situations and major life events, prayer provided them a sense of peace and

comfort. They also described prayer as an effective coping strategy to help them face challenges. The third theme, Cultural Influence, encompassed three subthemes: cultural expressions, communal prayer, and community engagement. Participants highlighted the collective aspect of prayer and its influence in the community in the support of their psychological well-being. The practice of prayer was embedded in the cultural traditions of participants.

The next and final chapter will discuss these results and provide a conclusion to the study. This will include an examination of the implications and limitations of the research. It will also offer recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the impact of prayer on the psychological well-being of African-American Christian evangelicals through their lived experiences. This study targeted African-American Christian evangelicals living in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia. This chapter contains a comprehensive description of the research results discussed in Chapter Four. The implications of these findings are discussed in depth, followed by an examination for further research, and a summary of the findings is presented. The goal was to synthesize the research findings, draw meaningful conclusions, and provide practical guidance for future scientific endeavors and community practices.

Summary of Findings

In-depth analysis of the participants' lived experiences shared during their semi-structured interviews resulted in several codes in relation to the impact and role of psychological well-being, coping strategies in challenging times, and cultural and religious influences of prayer practices. Three major themes emerged from the data analysis: Personal Growth, Emotional Support, and Cultural Influences.

The first theme, Personal Growth, underlined the contribution of prayer to participants' personal development and psychological well-being. Participants reported engaging in different types of prayer, such as petitionary, intercessory, thanksgiving, and confession prayers, which played a significant role in their spiritual and emotional growth. Prayer was an integral part of participants' daily routines. There were no set specific times for them to draw themselves close to God through prayer; some participants reported praying multiple times a day, and others described praying three times a day. It was evident that the impact of prayer fostered resilience,

enhanced spiritual maturity, and increased self-awareness, which were very beneficial for their psychological well-being. For instance, Participant 2 described how prayer helped her to overcome major life challenges, such as divorce and major surgeries, which illustrated that prayer had the ability to strengthen individuals and support them during difficult times.

The second theme, Emotional Support, highlighted how prayer served as a coping mechanism and provided peace and comfort. Participants reported that prayer was not just a religious and spiritual practice; it was the most-important tool that they used to navigate through life challenges and difficulties. When they were going through hard times, they turned to God in prayer to cope and find peace for their soul. Through prayer, participants reported finding mental clarity, strength, and emotional stability. For example, Participant 10 reported that she was stressed during her freshman year in college because she was not doing very well academically, but through prayer, she was able to bring her grades up and do much better academically. Participant 9 expressed how prayer played an important role in improving his mental health during his freshman year. Prayer also provided a sense of peace and comfort, as described by Participant 3, who explained feeling angry at a family member, and after praying, they reported feeling relaxed. Participant 8 also described that prayer helped manage anxiety and maintain a sense of grounding. Furthermore, Participant 7, a Veteran, shared how they utilized prayer to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-related symptoms, highlighting its calming and stabilizing effects.

The third theme, Cultural Influence, explored the collective aspect of prayer and its roles in supporting psychological well-being within the community. Participants emphasized how cultural traditions and communal prayer influenced their prayer practices. Participant 5 reported that the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) put a huge emphasis on prayer before they

took part in every activity. Participants reported engaging in community prayers, such as prayer vigils, prayer walks, and outreach programs to address community issues and foster solidarity. The act of helping their community through prayer had an important role on their psychological well-being. Furthermore, Participant 6 highlighted that collective prayer was essential for overcoming challenges, such as gun violence, and that it encouraged community members to support one another.

In summary, the findings revealed that prayer played a significant role in the lives of African-American Christian evangelicals, as it related to their psychological well-being. Prayer contributed to personal development, emotional support, and community connections. These themes and subthemes described the impact of prayer on psychological well-being and underlined its significance as a coping mechanism and source of strength within the community.

Discussion

The purpose of this section was to discuss the results of this study, as related to the literature review presented in Chapter Two. The findings of this study added to the existing body of research on the impact of prayer on psychological well-being among African American Christian evangelicals. The results further explained how prayer played a significant role in enhancing psychological well-being, providing insight regarding how prayer served as an effective coping strategy to deal with life challenges, promote personal growth, and foster social bonds.

Empirical Literature

The literature review highlighted the positive impact of prayer practices on psychological well-being, such as reducing anxiety symptoms, promoting emotional regulation, increasing life satisfactions, enhancing social support, and decreasing mental health symptoms. The study

enriched the existing literature by providing a specific insight within the context of African-American Christian evangelicals.

Prayer Promotes Personal Growth

The findings in this study about prayer as a religious activity aligned with previous literature on how it contributed to psychological well-being. Prayer was found to foster resilience, increase spiritual maturity, and have a positive outlook of their life challenges. This finding was consistent with existing literature that highlighted how prayer helped individuals to cultivate their spiritual maturity, have a better sense of self, foster resilience, and adapt to effectively navigate life challenges (Emmons, 2000; Pargament et al., 2011).

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of daily prayer in fostering personal and spiritual development, which supported the literature that showed that regular routines of prayer could benefit psychological well-being (Albatnuni & Koszycki, 2020; Nahud et al., 2020). Participants in this study reported praying regularly as a way to strengthen personal growth, which helped them to be more in tune with their inner self. Participants in this study mentioned different types of prayers that contributed to their personal development, such as petitionary prayer, intercessory prayer, thanksgiving prayer, and confession prayer, which supported the literature. Petitionary prayer had been found to have a substantial psychological effect on individuals' psychological well-being (Pargament et al., 2011). Previous literature raised concerns about the potential benefits of petitionary prayer on psychological well-being, due to spiritual phenomena (Benson et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2006). However, the current study found that African-American evangelicals reported experiencing a positive impact through petitionary prayer, due to their trust in God. Confession and thanksgiving prayer, as reported by participants

as part of their prayer practices, also supported the existing literature (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2022; Whittington & Scher, 2010).

The findings highlighted the uniformly positive impact of prayer on psychological well-being, as reported by participants, which contradicted studies that underlined the potential adverse of certain types of prayer on psychological well-being (Zarzyck & Krok, 2021). This difference might have been related to the significant and communal support within the study's sample, which indicated that context significantly affected the psychological outcomes of prayer.

Prayer Serves as an Emotional Support

Prayer was found in this study to offer substantial emotional support, serving as both a coping strategy for dealing with stress and life challenges and a source of comfort and peace. This finding supported the existing body of research, suggesting that prayer could be beneficial in the reduction of stress and anxiety symptoms (Hekmati & Hojjati, 2015; Whittington & Scher, 2010). Participants from the study reported using prayer as a coping mechanism to manage stressful situations and maintain mental clarity, which aligned with the religious coping theory (Pargament et al., 2013). For example, Participant 10 reported using prayer to cope with academic stress during her freshman year, which reinforced the findings that prayer could be an effective coping strategy to reduce stress and manage negative emotions (Chirico et al., 2020; McCulloch & Parks-Stamm, 2020). Participants reported that they found peace and comfort through prayer, which echoed the literature, where participants reported feeling a sense of peace, calmness, and comfort after praying (Groover, 2020). The findings also described how prayer could be an emotional support for individuals when they were facing a difficult moment.

Cultural Influence of Prayer

The findings showed an important role of prayer within the cultural and communal context of African-American Christian evangelicals. The impact of community cohesion and tradition was consistent with previous literature, which emphasized the social aspect theory (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Participants reported that certain cultural traditions influenced their prayer practices, corroborating the existing research on the interaction between culture and religious practices (Skipper et al., 2018). The findings also showed prayer being used as a tool to deal with social issues, such as gun violence in the community, which backed up the existing studies and highlighted how prayer played an important role during slavery and civil rights movements. Participants 1, 5, and 6 reported engaging in activities to support and influence change in their community through prayers. Their engagement in communal prayer for their community enriched previous literature on how prayer for one another entailed a sense of community and unity (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Contribution and Contrast in the Literature

While the findings from this study supported the existing literature on the benefits of prayer on psychological well-being, this study added some unique contributions to previous research (Albatnuni & Koszycki, 2020; Nahud et al., 2020). The focus on prayer's cultural and communal aspect provided a unique perspective not often explored in the broader literature. The study highlighted how communal prayer practices, such as prayer walks and morning vigils, could strengthen community bonds and solve social issues within the African-American Christian evangelical community. The emphasis on the cultural aspect of this study provided a starting point for the researchers to consider when studying the influence of prayer on psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals.

One contrast in this study was that participants reported that petitionary prayer positively influenced their psychological well-being, while previous studies expressed concerns about the negative effects of petitionary prayer on psychological well-being (Zarzycka & Krok, 2021). The issue of this discrepancy might have been related to the cultural context of this study, which played a crucial role on the effects of prayer on psychological well-being. This underscored the need for further research to explore the influence of petitionary prayer among different groups or ethnicities. Such research could reveal how contextual factors can influence certain types of prayer, thereby engaging the academic community in a vital area of study.

The researcher anticipated that the findings would reveal the nuances between different types of prayer and psychological well-being. Based on the research, he expected to find that petitionary prayer could have a negative impact on psychological well-being, but that was not the case in this study. The researcher also expected people to report feelings of disappointment or frustration when God did not answer their prayers, which could have negatively impacted their psychological well-being. However, contrary to these expectations, participants reported putting their trust in God, regardless of the outcome. They also demonstrated remarkable resilience while dealing with life challenges, such as death, sickness, and community violence, inspiring hope and admiration.

The researcher did anticipate that participants would engage in daily prayer routines to enhance their psychological well-being. Previous research supported that a regular prayer routine had been found to be beneficial in improving psychological well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2022; Whittington & Scher, 2010). The findings of this study supported the existing literature, as participants reported engaging in daily prayer to cope with life challenges and find peace and comfort. The researcher also noticed that the content of the participants'

prayers was more important than the frequency of their prayers. Participants strongly emphasized why they prayed for themselves and their community.

Furthermore, the researcher also expected participants to use prayer as a coping mechanism to manage their depression, anxiety, stress, and other life challenges. The findings from this study supported the expectations, as all participants reported using prayer to cope with their stressors, such as job loss, financial hardship, sickness, and complex relationships. Participants provided a rich, detailed account of the use of different types of prayers to address their needs and wants before God. They reported using intercessory prayer to pray on behalf of others and thanksgiving prayer to cultivate gratitude, which had been beneficial in improving psychological well-being and had helped them navigate life's challenges and provide emotional stability (Ahmadi et al., 2019; Groover, 2020). What was particularly insightful, however, were the detailed accounts of how different types of prayer addressed specific needs. For instance, intercessory prayer was often used to shift focus from personal problems to the needs of others, providing a sense of purpose and reducing personal stress. Thanksgiving prayer, on the other hand, helped participants cultivate gratitude, which was known to enhance psychological well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2022).

Theoretical/Conceptual Literature

The conceptual framework of this study was built on three theoretical frameworks: cognitive theory, social support theory, and religious coping theory. The research results offered useful insights into the connection of those frameworks within the specific context of African-American Christian evangelicals. Each theory will be expanded upon.

Cognitive Theory

The cognitive theory, which focused on the cognitive processes in understanding behaviors and emotions, offered a valuable viewpoint on the influence of prayer on psychological well-being. The cognitive theory framework provided an understanding of life's meaning and their role within the world. It also suggested that individuals who engage in religious practices, such as prayer, can experience peace and meaning in their life (James, 1902). The findings of the current study aligned with the cognitive theory, as participants reported using prayer to regulate their emotions and become more aware of who they are. Participants in this study engaged in daily prayer to enhance their mental clarity, which was consistent with the cognitive theory, which highlighted the impact of mental states on behaviors and emotions. Participants also reported using prayer to navigate life difficulties and find peace, which was also related to the cognitive theory, asserting that individuals could find peace and meaning in life through religious experiences (Jung, 1993).

Social Support Theory

The social support theory underlined the significance on how social networks and relationship can improve individual's well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Thoits, 2011). The results of this study aligned with this theory, as participants reported engaging in different prayer activities in their community, such as prayer vigils and prayer walks, in providing emotional and psychological support. The study also described that community support and social connection played a significant role among African-American Christian evangelicals' psychological well-being. Participants in this study highlighted that community support enhanced their psychological resilience facing life challenges, such as gun violence in the community. It also

strengthened their relationship with one another, which also supported existing literature on social support and the psychological benefits on relationship and well-being (Uchino, 2006).

Religious Coping Theory

Religious coping theory emphasized the role of religious beliefs and practices in helping individuals to cope with stress and life difficulties (Pargament et al., 2013). The results of the current study supported participants using prayer as a coping mechanism to manage stress and deal with life challenges. The literature also highlighted a strong connection between religious coping and physical health problems (Park et al., 2018). Participant 2 reported having two major surgeries, but that through prayer, she was able to find peace and emotional stability. Furthermore, Participant 9 reported using prayer as a coping strategy to deal with stress during his freshman year in college. The routine of prayer and the different types of prayer reported being used by participants in this study reinforced the idea that religious practices, such as prayer, could be an effective coping strategy to enhance people's psychological well-being.

Implications

The results of this study had important theoretical, empirical, and practical consequences. Mental health providers, religious leaders, and community members were all considered stakeholders in this section. This provided guidance on the study's theoretical, empirical, and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

This study was guided by cognitive theory, social support theory, and religious coping theory. The cognitive theory highlighted how individuals' thought processes influenced their emotions and behaviors. The results of this study supported this theory by demonstrating how prayer practices among African-American Christians improved their thought processes, such as

greater sense awareness about who they are and better mental clarity that affects their decision making. The findings of this study reported that prayer had a positive impact on the thought patterns of participants, by achieving inner peace and comfort and fostering resilience to face challenging times, which aligned with the cognitive theory.

The social support theory focused on the significant impact of social networks on psychological well-being. The results of this study showed that participants engaged in different religious activities and communal prayer to improve their emotional and social support, which validated this theory. Participants reported praying for one another in the community to foster solidarity, comfort, and reassurance during challenging times.

The religious coping theory underscored how religious practices could be beneficial in helping individuals to cope with stress and adversity. The findings in this study strongly demonstrated that prayer can be used as an effective coping strategy to help people manage stress and deal with life challenges, which also supported the religious coping theory. Participants reported engaging in different types of prayer, such as intercessory, petitionary, thanksgiving, and confession prayers, which enhanced their psychological well-being.

Empirical Implications

The study supported the existing body of research on the benefits of prayer on psychological well-being. Previous research found that prayer can help individuals with a wide range of psychological issues, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness. Furthermore, the results from this study were consistent with prior studies on how prayer can help to improve emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and offer social support (Ellison et al., 2012; Krause & Hayward, 2014; Smith et al., 2007; Whittington & Scher, 2010).

This study provided a unique perspective of the experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals—a population that has been underrepresented in previous research. It underlined how prayer played an important role in the contribution of personal growth, emotional support, and community engagement. Furthermore, this study added new insight on the importance of cultural and communal aspects of prayer and offered a deeper understanding of the influence of prayer on psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals.

Additionally, the study addressed the gap in literature about the integration of prayer into the lives of African-American Christian evangelicals. It also demonstrated how prayer influenced psychological well-being and the ability to cope with life challenges. The findings from this study enriched the empirical understanding of the importance of prayer within this specific cultural and religious setting.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provided several practical implications for mental health professionals, religious leaders, and community members. This study shared insights on the integration of prayer into therapeutic options. It also helped mental health providers to have a deeper understanding of the role of prayer in clients' lives and how to be culturally sensitive when working with African-American Christian evangelicals, where prayer served as a catalyst to promote growth and foster resilience.

The results of this study demonstrated the importance of communal prayer practices and how church members could engage in different types of prayers to enhance their psychological well-being. Religious leaders could help their congregants' psychological well-being by

encouraging and supporting regular prayer activities, such as prayer walks, prayer vigils, and communal prayer.

The study illustrated the efficacy of prayer in addressing social problems and fostering community bonds. Community members can use prayer as a means to strengthen connection and assist those in serving the needs of the communities during challenging times. For instance, Participant 6 reported using prayer to address gun violence in the community.

In addition, mental health providers, religious leaders, and stakeholders in the community can use the findings of this study to develop programs and interventions that utilize prayer and religious practices to enhance psychological well-being and resilience within the African-American Christian evangelical community. They can also be more inclusive and understanding in meeting the needs of individuals, where prayer serves as a tool for their emotional support.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was limited in terms of geographic scope and participant criteria. The sample of this study was derived from African-American evangelicals in Northwest Roanoke, Virginia, which may have limited the ability to generalize the findings to other regions. The study also had a specific set of criteria for individuals to be part of the study (see Appendix A), such as be 18 years old or older; self-identify as African American and Christian evangelicals; and be active members of their local church for at least 2 years. This specific criteria also excluded those who did not meet these requirements, such as people who did not affiliate with the mainline Protestants or belong to a specific organization.

Ten participants were selected to be part of the study, which may not have been a good representation of the broader population of African-American Christian evangelicals. The majority of participants of the study were southern Baptist, which hindered the ability to see

others' perspectives on the impact on psychological well-being among other African-American Christian evangelicals, such as Wesleyan Church, Church of God, and Assemblies of God (Patton, 2014). Thus, these results were context specific, which may not have been applicable to different populations or settings (Maxwell, 2013).

Self-reporting bias was another limitation of this study. Participants self-reported their experiences on how prayer impacted their lives and psychological well-being, which may have been subject to bias or inaccuracies. Participants may have also answered based on their preconceived notions about prayer, which may change through time. Longitudinal studies may provide a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, this study was a qualitative study; while it provided insightful information about the impact of prayer on psychological well-being, it did not establish the causal relationship between the variables.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should focus on geographic expansion by including more participants from different geographic locations, in order to capture a broader impact of prayer on psychological well-being. Furthermore, having a diverse demographic population that includes different age groups, educational backgrounds, and denominational affiliations could strengthen the understanding of the role and impact of prayer across all groups (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Through longitudinal studies, future research could also focus on how prayer evolves over time and provide a more dynamic perspective. A comparative study is another area that future research could emphasize by comparing the prayer experiences of African-American Christian evangelicals with other religions or cultures, which could highlight the commonalities and

differences in prayer practices on the effects of mental and psychological well-being (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2014).

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the research's findings, emphasizing theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. The study strengthened cognitive, social support, and religious coping theories by indicating the important role of prayer in boosting psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals. The results of this study added to prior studies by offering a new understanding of the specific experiences and cultural contexts of this demographic.

The chapter also highlighted the delimitations and limitations of the study, acknowledging the restraints of the sample size, criteria participation, geographic focus, and self-reporting bias. Furthermore, the recommendations for future research focused on the need to expand the geographic location, having more diverse demographic groups and longitudinal and comparative studies.

Overall, the findings of this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of prayer on psychological well-being among African-American Christian evangelicals and offered practical implications for mental health providers and community members. It also demonstrated the significance of integrating prayer practices into support systems to foster resiliency and deepen psychological well-being within the African-American Christian evangelical community.

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Appendix A
Demographic Survey

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you identify yourself as African American and as a member of the Christian evangelical community?
3. Are you currently residing in Northwest Roanoke?
4. Have you been an active church member at a church in Northwest Roanoke for 2 years?
5. Over the past 2 years, how often have you participated in church activities? Would you say your participation has been weekly, monthly, or more sporadic?

Appendix B

Social Media Recruitment

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Community Care and Counseling degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to investigate how prayer impacts the psychological well-being of African American Christian evangelicals, delving into their lived experiences and religious practices. I want to know how African American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experience with prayers in relation to their psychological well-being, how prayer impacts their coping strategies during stress and adversity, and how the cultural and religious beliefs within the African American Christian Evangelicals Community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological well-being. Participants must be 18 or older, identify as African American and as members of the Christian evangelical community, must be actively residing in NW Roanoke, and have been an actively engaged member of a Christian evangelical church in Northwest Roanoke for at least 2 years. The 2 years does not have to be at the same church, and active engagement can be defined as regular attendance at worship services like Sundays, participation in activities like Bible studies, and volunteering one's time and talents. Participants will be asked to complete an online audio- or audio- and video-recorded interview (depending on the participant's preference), which should take about 90 minutes. After the interview, participants will also be asked to verify their interview transcripts for accuracy. If you wish to participate or wish to learn more, please direct message me. If you meet the study criteria, a consent document will be emailed to you within a week, and you will need to sign and return it prior to the interview. Participants will be given a \$25 physical VISA gift card as compensation.

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate how prayer impacts the psychological well-being of African American Christian evangelicals, delving into their lived experiences and religious practices. I want to know how African American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experience with prayers in relation to their psychological well-being, how prayer impacts their coping strategies during stress and adversity, and how the cultural and religious beliefs within the African American Christian Evangelicals Community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological well-being. I would like to invite eligible participants to be part of my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as African American, and have been members of a Christian evangelical church in Northwest Roanoke for at least 2 years. Interviews can be conducted either in-person using audio recording or online using video recording, depending on the participant's preference. About 90 minutes should be enough time to finish the interview. You will be sent an email with the interview transcript; to verify its accuracy, you should reply to it within five to seven days. Participants will also have the opportunity to discuss and correct their responses. Personal details such as names will be collected for this project, but rest assured that all data will be treated with the utmost confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and stored in a secured, protected password. For further information or to sign up, please email me at [REDACTED]. Afterwards, I will set up an appointment for the interview. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have attached a consent agreement to this email. Further details on my study are included in the consent forms. Before the interview, please indicate your participation by signing the consent form and sending it back to me via email.

In order to demonstrate my gratitude for taking part in this study, I will be providing participants with a \$25 Visa gift card after it is over.

Best regards,

Mikenley Lundy

Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]

Appendix D

IRB Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 3, 2024

Mikenley Lundy
Scott Edgar

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY23-24-1462 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALS: THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF PRAYER

Dear Mikenley Lundy, Scott Edgar,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: April 3, 2024. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval 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. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix E

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of The Lived Experiences and Psychological Well-Being Among African-American Christian Evangelicals: The Role and Impact of Prayer

Principal Investigator: Mikenley Lundy, Doctoral Candidate, School of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Thank you for considering being part of this research study. To be eligible to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as an African American and Christian evangelical, actively reside in NW Roanoke, and must have been an actively engaged member of a Christian evangelical church in Northwest Roanoke for at least 2 years. The 2 years does not have to be at the same church, and active engagement can be defined as regular attendance at worship services like Sundays, participation in activities like Bible studies, and volunteering one's time and talents. This research study is voluntary, meaning you can leave anytime you want.

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

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

My research aims to investigate how prayer impacts the psychological well-being of African American Christian evangelicals, delving into their lived experiences and religious practices. I want to know how African American Christian evangelicals describe their lived experience with prayers in relation to their psychological well-being, how prayer impacts their coping meaning during stress and adversity, and how the cultural and religious beliefs within the African American Christian Evangelicals Community shape the understanding and practice of prayer for psychological well-being.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you decide to be part of this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an online audio- or audio- and video-recorded interview that will take no more than 90 minutes.
2. Review the interview transcript that will be emailed to you to confirm accuracy. Your confirmation of transcript accuracy should be returned to the researcher via email within 5 - 7 days of receipt.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include enhancing understanding of how prayer impacts psychological well-being among African American Christian evangelicals which will provide insights on culturally sensitive mental health interventions and policymaking, promoting a more profound understanding of the distinctive spiritual practices prevalent within the African American community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks associated with participation are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

All data collected for this study will remain private. No identifying information about a participant will be included in published reports. Data collected for this study will be kept in a safe place, and no one other than the researcher will be able to access them.

- The responses of participants will be kept private by using pseudonyms instead of their real names.
- We will make sure that no one may overhear our interviews by holding them in a quiet, private area.
- With your consent, your information may be shared with other researchers or utilized in future studies. Any personally identifying information will be erased before data gathered from you is reused or shared, if appropriate.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all digital information will be erased.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. These recordings will be accessible to the researcher.

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

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Following verifying the interview transcripts for accuracy, participants will be provided with a physical \$25 VISA gift card.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Mikenley Lundy. You may ask questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Scott Edgar, at [REDACTED].

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the 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) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Name

Signature and Date

Appendix F

Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your background?
2. How long have you been a part of the African American Christian evangelical community?
3. Can you describe your regular religious and prayer practices?
4. How would you describe your personal experiences with prayer?
5. In what ways do you think prayer influences your psychological well-being?
6. Can you share an instance where prayer significantly impacted your mood or mental state?
7. What role do you believe prayer plays in your overall psychological well-being?
8. How do you utilize prayer during challenging or stressful times?
9. Could you recall a specific moment where prayer helped you cope with stress or adversity?
10. Do you think prayer changes how you respond to difficult situations? Can you give an example?
11. What aspects of prayer do you find most supportive when dealing with life's challenges?
12. How do your cultural or religious beliefs shape your practice of prayer?
13. Are there particular teachings or traditions in your community that influence how you pray?
14. What unique perspectives on prayer do you think the African American Christian evangelical community holds?

15. How are cultural and religious beliefs about prayer communicated within your community?

Appendix G

Figures

Figure 1

Participant Demographics

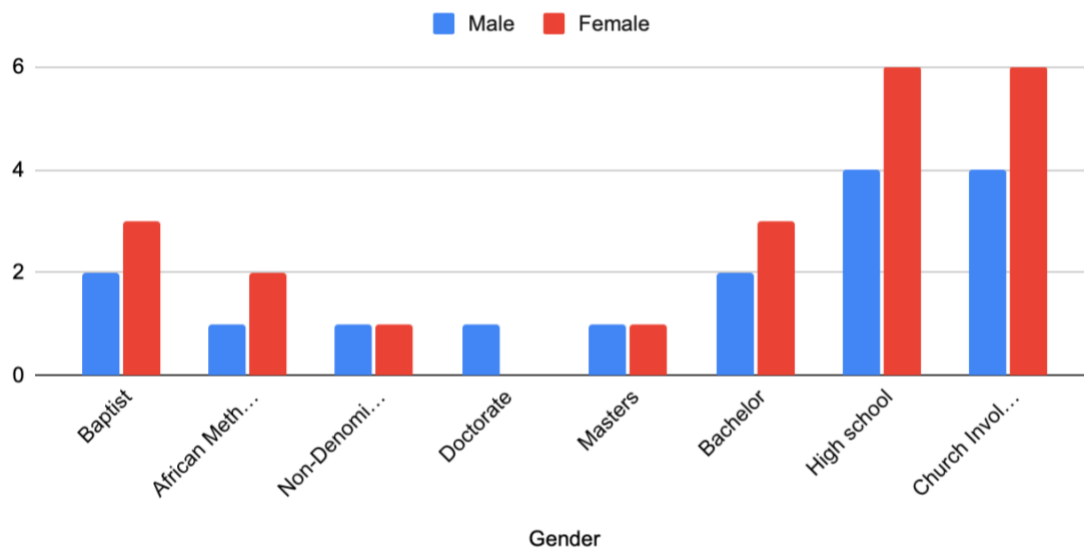


Figure 2

Personal Growth

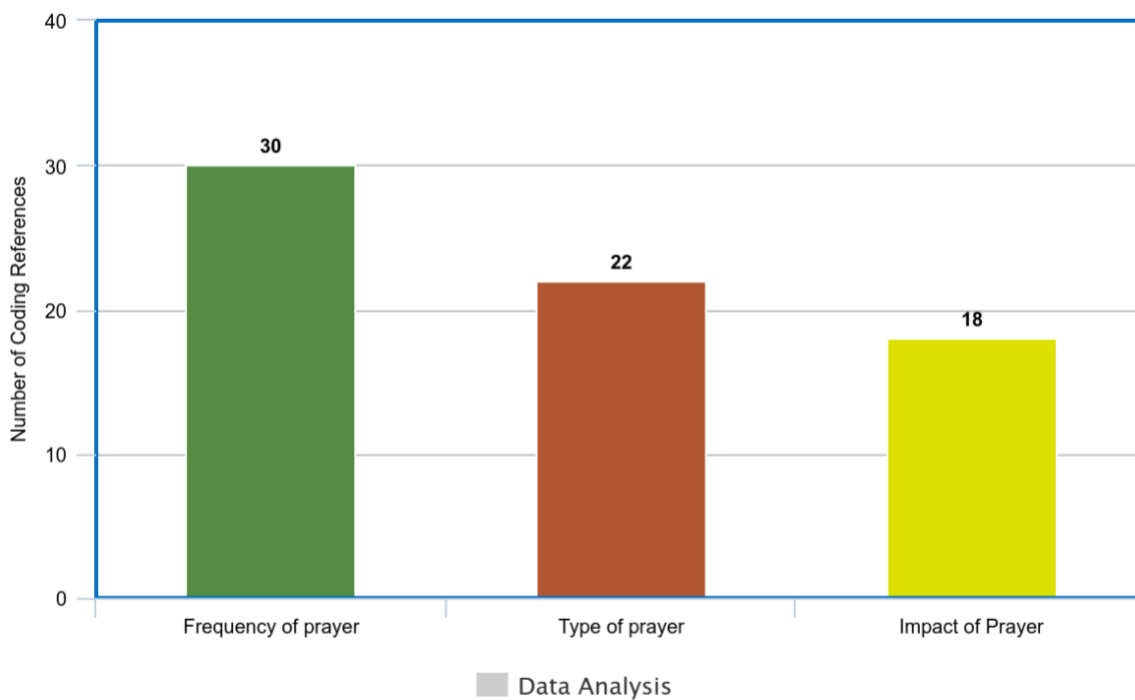
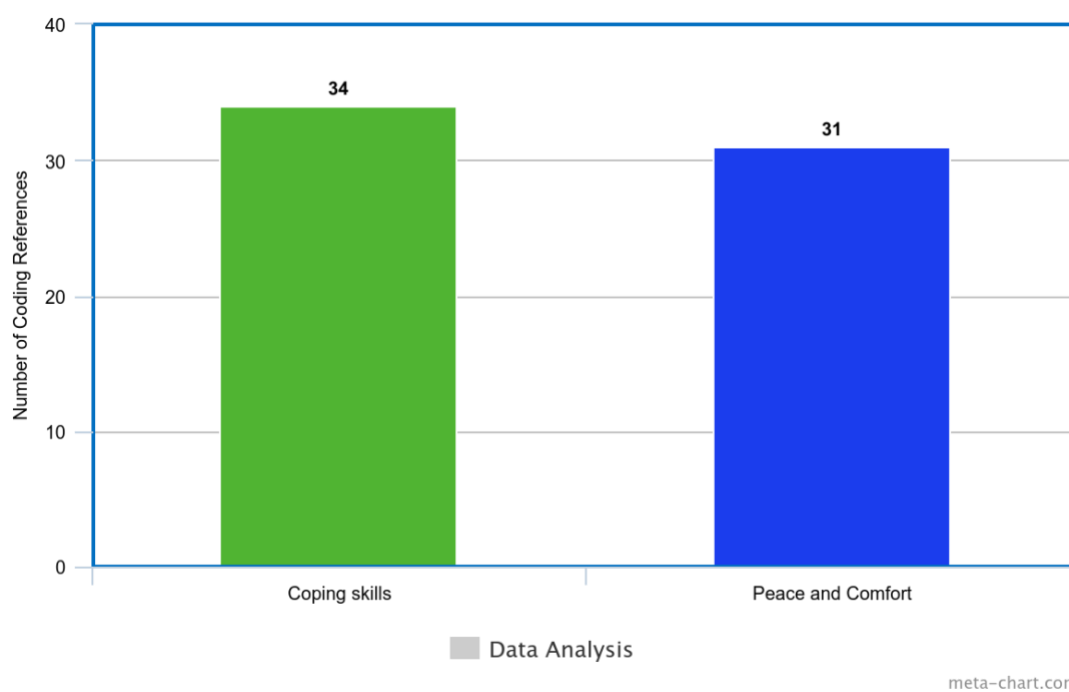


Figure 3*Emotional Support***Figure 4***Cultural Influence*