

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Building Hope in Outreach Ministry

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

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, September 25, 2024.

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Churches and faith-based organizations may discover their role in fulfilling the Great Commission seems to be overshadowed by their efforts to provide other forms of relief and support. Central Florida, like many different regions in the United States, is facing an epidemic of homelessness and addiction. Natural and manmade disasters also present urgent and existential threats. The researcher believes that building true and lasting hope in Jesus is key to facing these challenges in the long term. He hypothesized that intractable barriers may create hopelessness and shift the focus of ministry away from inspiring hope. He conducted purposive interviews and hope assessments among church volunteer workers who provided food, clothing, transportation, and other relief to individuals struggling with homelessness and addiction. During this action research project, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the ability of volunteers and patrons to travel and hold large gatherings, and Hurricane Ian challenged ministry workers to shift their focus to disaster relief temporarily. Though these changes caused unanticipated shifts in the researcher's investigation into the level and nature of the hope of ministry workers and patrons, he found deep and resilient hope in Jesus already resident among believers, as well as an expressed desire to focus their limited resources on those truly seeking transformation. The findings challenge Christian ministries to clarify the scope and nature of their ministry activities to maintain their focus on fulfilling the Great Commission.

To my loving wife Sonya and all the faithful workers who freely and selflessly offered their time and talents at Hope Station.

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Abbreviations

AHS	Adult Hope Scale
CCOG	<i>Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne, Florida</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FBO	<i>Faith-Based Organization</i>
HHI	<i>Herth Hope Index</i>
IRB	Internal Review Board
LH	<i>Learned Helplessness</i>
NGO	<i>Non-governmental Organization</i>
PTSD	<i>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Hope Station is an outreach ministry of Cornerstone Church of God in Melbourne, Florida. It seeks to fulfill the Great Commission by inspiring hope in Jesus Christ. Its ministry is primarily among people struggling with chronic homelessness. Nearby church, civic, and government organizations provide an abundant though scattered array of resources and services. These local agencies offer relief that primarily focuses on immediate material needs and recovery programs. This immediate relief fosters a temporal hope dependent upon tangible and often sustained third-party intervention. This kind of intervention is typically unsustainable over the long haul and fails to address the underlying causes of despair, addiction, and homelessness. True and sustaining hope is a missing element and is essential in salvation and lasting recovery from homelessness and other personal and family crises.

Ministry Context

The ministry context for this action research project is the Hope Station outreach ministry of Cornerstone Church of God (CCOG) of Melbourne, Florida. It is where a group of compassionate volunteers seek to provide relief services to people experiencing homelessness and addiction. These volunteers are not just compassionate citizens, they are Christians, many of whom have faced similar struggles. They do not want simply to provide them with relief, they want to share the hope they find in Jesus—hope for a better future, a path for real change, and a

body of believers willing to help them along the way.¹ The needs are great, intractable, and existential. One of the biggest challenges for these volunteers is helping people in need see through their crisis, helping them perceive and focus on a real and tangible hope in Jesus.

Melbourne is in the southern region of Brevard County.² It is one of over a dozen cities that occupy more than sixty miles of the Atlantic coastline. This is Florida's Space Coast, home to Kennedy Space Center and Patrick Space Force Base. It is a tourist beach destination just east of Orlando's major theme parks. According to the United States Census Bureau, Melbourne accounted for about 13 percent of the population of Brevard County in 2019.³

Church of God

CCOG is under the umbrella of the Church of God, an international Pentecostal denomination with headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee.⁴ The Pew Research Center reports that membership within this denomination in the United States consists of more women (59%) than men (41%), who are primarily white (65%) and Latino (28%).⁵ The primary adult age range is trending toward baby boomers, 50–64 (40%), and Generation X, 30–49 (32%), with younger membership down by a third and older membership down by almost half (43%) over seven

¹ Cornerstone Church of God, accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.cornerstonemlb.com/our-visionus>.

² City of Melbourne | City of Melbourne, FL, accessed June 22, 2024, <https://www.melbourneflorida.org/about>.

³ "Brevard County," Brevard County - Place Explorer - Data Commons, accessed August 28, 2021, https://datacommons.org/place/geoId/12009?utm_medium=explore&mprop=count&popt=Person&hl=en.

⁴ "Our Church," Cornerstone Church of God.

⁵ "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics, and Statistics," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, last modified September 9, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/church-of-god-cleveland-tennessee/>.

years.⁶ The members believe in God, heaven and hell, pray daily, believe religion is essential, attend church weekly, and read the Bible and consider it authoritative.⁷

Broadway Community Church

Broadway Community Church (BCC) in the heart of Fort Myers, Florida, is a sister church to Cornerstone Church of God. Located on opposite sides of the central Florida peninsula, both churches are part of the Church of God Pentecostal denomination founded in 1886 and headquartered in Cleveland, Tennessee, and are under the oversight of the Florida Church of God Executive Offices in Tampa, Florida. As part of their ministry, Broadway Church of God is a hurricane and disaster relief hub in Fort Myers. Located in a coastal area on the Gulf of Mexico side of the Florida peninsula, this church can project relief efforts onto the more vulnerable barrier islands that serve as a primary storm buffer to the mainland. These areas suffered the most disastrous effects of Hurricane Ian, a major Category 5 hurricane that struck the southeastern peninsula of Florida in September 2022.

Hope Station

Hope Station is an outreach ministry of CCOG. It seeks to share the gospel and build hope in Jesus Christ within the local community. It grew spontaneously from a men's fellowship breakfast into a weekly community breakfast with prayer and devotions. The ministry continued to experience transformation driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. It emerged as a spiritual support center offering prayer, informal counseling, and temporary assistance to adults of all ages, both male and female, who struggle with abject poverty, chronic homelessness, chronic

⁶ "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics, and Statistics,"

⁷ Ibid.

addiction, and chronic spiritual and mental health issues. Hope Station built cooperative relationships with other church and community support agencies while seeing corresponding growth in the breadth of its ministry. This growth brought initiatives to partner in temporary shelters, participate in case management toward long-term housing, and develop transitional housing for homeless persons released from jail. It became a cooperative, centrally located support center attending to the spiritual needs of the local community. Through personal collaboration and partnership with other relief agencies, the outreach endeavored to supplement material and crisis relief with pastoral counseling and spiritual and emotional support that builds hope in Jesus Christ as the agent and pathway of lasting change.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the ministry landscape. COVID-19 is a highly contagious illness caused by the coronavirus that emerged in late 2019 and early 2020, causing worldwide disease and death, generating great fear among the world's population, and prompting herculean efforts on a global scale to contain the virus. Large public gatherings were initially prohibited by government agencies that sought to slow the transmission of the virus.⁸ These prohibitions drove the ministry of Hope Station to venture out of the church facility and into the homeless camps, where volunteer workers began hosting church services and delivering meals along with Christian hope, encouragement, prayer, and informal counseling. Volunteers also focused on renovating and opening Hope Station's new outreach center. As community health

⁸ Imen Ayouni, et al., "Effective Public Health Measures to Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19: A Systematic Review - BMC Public Health," *BioMed Central (BioMed Central, May 29, 2021)*, 2, <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-11111-1#citeas>, 2.

restrictions were relaxed, the prevalence of the virus still made frequent large gatherings unwise.⁹ The meals that once inspired the primary venue for interaction with the homeless community were once again served at the church facility but were less frequent (monthly). Instead of hosting weekly meals, the outreach center opened several days each week as a venue for prayer, Bible study, informal counseling, one-on-one discipleship, and temporary assistance to individuals and small groups.

An Outreach Center

CCOG renovated an old parsonage into a Hope Station outreach center that opened in September 2021. Its purpose was to develop a safe place for individuals to gather for spiritual support and informal pastoral counseling. This new direction presented new challenges to the ministry team and volunteer base and a need to further develop workers in order to provide more comprehensive and personalized spiritual support. The presence of the new outreach center in the community further expanded the ministry context of Hope Station. More one-on-one interaction revealed new ways Hope Station could help and stirred growing partnerships with other local ministries and social service providers.

Financial and Material Support

Cornerstone Church of God (CCOG) allowed Hope Station to renovate an old parsonage that had been used for storage into a new outreach center. Volunteers provided labor for the renovation. Much of this labor was performed by patrons who were struggling with

⁹ “Statement on the Tenth Meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee Regarding the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed February 12, 2022, [https://www.who.int/news/item/19-01-2022-statement-on-the-tenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/19-01-2022-statement-on-the-tenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic).

homelessness themselves. Materials were purchased from a five-thousand-dollar private donation. A former law firm donated office furniture for the new outreach center. The church provided new cabinets that were left over from other renovation projects. Other building supplies were purchased out of Hope Station funds.

CCOG provides financial support to Hope Station from private donations and a “gleaning” portion of the church tithes. Three percent of all tithes are set aside for ministry to the poor (based upon Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; Ruth 2:1–10), usually a few hundred dollars each month. The outreach pastor also receives a small stipend (\$175 per week) redirected from cleaning and mowing expenses in return for assuming those responsibilities. The other workers are volunteer lay persons primarily affiliated with the parent church, though some attend other local churches. Second Harvest Food Bank provides low-cost food items for the food pantry, daily needs at the outreach center, and larger community meals and outreach events. Hope Station distributes clothing that is donated by individuals and by surplus sharing from local thrift stores. Volunteers use their own vehicles and fuel to pick up and deliver food and to transport individuals to shelters or recovery centers. CCOG absorbs the cost of electricity, water, and other facility expenses.

These financial resources fund the facility. They help enable volunteers to provide spiritual support and some temporary material support to individuals in the community who are struggling with homelessness and addiction. They create a venue for a ministry of temporary relief, encouragement, spiritual support, and inspiring hope in Christ.

Homeless Population

The need is great. Volunteers with the Brevard County Homeless Coalition conduct an annual twenty-four-hour “point-in-time” count of homeless individuals and families within the

county.¹⁰ The last count from January 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic estimated that there were 815 homeless persons in the county, down slightly but consistent with the previous four years.¹¹ The decrease was not attributed to a lower number of homeless persons but to fewer volunteers available to conduct the count.¹² They estimated that among the tally of homeless persons, 181 are unsheltered and chronically homeless.¹³ The number is probably much higher. Hope Station served a weekly breakfast to well over a hundred chronically homeless persons each week in Melbourne alone throughout 2019. Significantly, local media reports that in 2021, fifty-three unsheltered homeless persons died in the Melbourne area, roughly half of those deaths being drug-related.¹⁴

The warm climate draws many homeless persons to the Melbourne area, especially in the winter months. Very few unsheltered homeless persons have cars. Most typically live outside under bridges, between buildings, in tents, or under tarps in vacant wooded areas individually or in small encampments. Their transportation options are limited. There is no local rail service. Bus service is sparse. There is no bus service to remote areas, and non-handicapped homeless persons must pay the regular fare (though some primary hub routes are free to residents with local identification). Walking is dangerous. With sparse sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle lanes, Brevard is ranked third among the twenty most hazardous metropolitan areas for

¹⁰ J. D. Gallop, “Hard Times, Struggles Heard as Homeless COUNT Undertaken across Brevard,” Florida Today (January 27, 2020), <https://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/2020/01/27/brevard-county-homeless-coalition-conducts-annual-count/4589143002/>.

¹¹ “CoC Performance Profile FL–513,” CoC Performance Profile FL–513 (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 10, 2020), CoC_Perf_CoC_FL–513–2019_FL_2019.pdf.

¹² Gallop, “Hard Times, Struggles Heard as Homeless COUNT Undertaken across Brevard.”

¹³ CoC Performance Profile FL–513

¹⁴ Rick Neale, “Daily Bread Vigil Remembers Homeless Who Died This Year, Warns of Fentanyl Dangers,” Florida Today (December 22, 2021), <https://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/2021/12/22/daily-bread-vigil-remembers-homeless-who-died-year-warns-fentanyl-dangers/8970287002/>.

pedestrians.¹⁵ There are no public bathrooms in most parks and public spaces, and business owners typically limit their facilities' use to their customers.

Substance abuse and addiction are leading contributors to homelessness and are apparent among many unsheltered homeless persons in Brevard County. Hope Station works to provide spiritual support and informal counseling and to steer those struggling with chronic addiction into inpatient Christian recovery programs like Teen Challenge.¹⁶ Most of these programs are full, far away, and (except for Teen Challenge¹⁷) expensive.

Mental health problems also contribute to the unsheltered homeless population in Brevard. Community mental health services in Florida are only offered through private, not public, providers.¹⁸ The Florida Baker Act allows judges, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers to order individuals to be held with or without their consent for up to seventy-two hours for observation and treatment.¹⁹ The primary mental health provider in Melbourne has a typical three-day observation cycle into which an individual may be committed with or without their consent, after which they are usually released without definitive follow-up care. They are overfilled and are often used as a sheltering mechanism by those wanting to temporarily escape the rigors of living outdoors. This mechanism, while protecting individuals

¹⁵ Rachael Thomas, "Eight of the 10 Most Dangerous Metro Areas for Pedestrians Are in Florida, Report Says," Florida Today (September 18, 2019), <https://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/2019/09/18/florida-most-dangerous-state-walking-pedestrians-smart-growth-america-roads/2363941001/>.

¹⁶ Remjs Runcan and Rebeca Lupşa, "Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Teen Challenge Programme after 13 Years of Social Work in Recovering Romanian Addicts" *Social Work* 1, January 2020): 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁸ "Adult Mental Health (AMH)," Adult Mental Health (AMH) - Florida Department of Children and Families, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/adult-mental-health/>.

¹⁹ Jan Rebstock and Cheryl Smith, "Baker Act Basics," Risk Rx - Self-Insurance Programs (University of Florida, January 2008), <https://flbog.sip.ufl.edu/risk-rx-article/baker-act-basics/>, 2–3.

from arbitrary long-term institutionalization, keeps them in a cycle of homelessness and addiction that offers them no real hope for escape.

Decline in the Homeless Population

The unsheltered homeless population appears to be in decline, as indicated by a sharp reduction in the number of individuals seeking assistance. This decline is ostensible for a couple of reasons. First, a cleanup Melbourne campaign driven by local businesses and politicians aims to reduce or remove homeless encampments. It is bolstered by efforts at Orlando/Melbourne International Airport, in neighboring Palm Bay, and by the Brevard County Sheriff in partnership with the U.S. Marshals Service. The expansion of the airport justifies these efforts, along with the commercial development of vacant land, and measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Second, federal assistance stemming from the COVID-19 emergency response and recovery funds are being used to temporarily house people experiencing homelessness to reduce the spread of the virus further. The national eviction moratorium may have helped offset homelessness during the financial collapse of the pandemic. Still, the lapse of the moratorium in the middle of 2021 left many new individuals and families in jeopardy. A sharp rise in homelessness is anticipated.

Cornerstone Church of God

CCOG (formerly Melbourne Church of God) is a seventy-year-old church with an aging membership and a lagging young adult population. It is centrally located downtown across from a major hospital, adjacent to a veterans park, near a public library, civic auditorium, a large catholic church and school, and near many other community resources, including public health services and food pantries. The neighborhood around the church is economically declining, with

mostly older homes, buildings, and businesses. The church shares its parking with a medical transport company in return for transportation services for disabled persons in the congregation. Occupying a prominent corner property between many public service and public assistance resources, the church experiences frequent pedestrian traffic; often, these are individuals who are struggling with homelessness, poverty, and addiction. The church also struggles with unsheltered homeless persons camping on the property at night who often leave behind rubbish, including cigarette butts, alcohol cans, and drug paraphernalia.

CCOG is a mother church to several other local churches but experienced a significant church split many years ago and has never fully recovered. The attendance is small, and the membership is aging. The church once boasted a large daycare facility over which it developed an early aversion to transients and loitering. This environment fostered a collegial atmosphere within the congregation marked by a wariness toward strangers. No-trespassing signs at pedestrian access points expressed a generally unwelcoming attitude toward the transient homeless and addicted persons who traversed the property. One member who grew up in the church described a historical view that embodies CCOG's former unwelcoming disposition toward persons who were homeless, transient, or suffering from addiction as, "They knew their place."

Community Sentiment

Resources abound, but the temperament of the community toward the homeless is marked by sympathy and acrimony. Hope Station is two blocks away from Daily Bread. This large publicly funded soup kitchen also provides clothing, shower facilities, housing assistance, job assistance, and other intervention and case management services. The Melbourne business district with shops and dining is only another block away. Many community members, churches,

non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs) eagerly offer love and help to those in need. Others, including residents, business leaders, and property owners, feel the safety and livelihood of the city are threatened by the presence of vagrants, loitering, and begging in parks and other public spaces outside their homes and establishments.²⁰ A newly elected mayor is actively seeking to “clean up” Melbourne²¹ by removing homeless encampments, cleaning up rubbish left behind, combining and relocating assistance services farther south, away from the business district, and eliminating panhandling. A local ordinance passed in 2021 in Melbourne provides a stiff fine (five hundred dollars) and up to sixty days in jail for drivers who give anything (including food or money) to panhandlers.²² Another long-standing ordinance provides stiff penalties, including jail time, for handing out meals in public spaces, including parks.²³ Hope Station is sheltered from these ordinances by offering meals and other handouts on private property but faces other risks associated with local code enforcement and civil liability.

Local Resistance and Support

Hope Station endured much opposition in its formative years, even—and especially—within the church, from those who expressed concern that transients would keep away families

²⁰ Josh Whitener, “Melbourne Seeks Solutions to Homelessness, Panhandling,” *Hometown News Brevard*, May 6, 2021, https://www.hometownnewsbrevard.com/news/melbourne-seeks-solutions-to-homelessness-panhandling/article_14ce0d22-adbc-11eb-80bf-f311b1cbf2c2.html.

²¹ Giles Malone, Casey Gulick, and Andrew Pappas, “City of Melbourne Draws Praise from Residents after Shutting down Illegal Encampments by Homeless Individuals,” *Space Coast Daily*, June 16, 2021, <https://spacecoastdaily.com/2021/06/city-of-melbourne-draws-praise-from-residents-after-shutting-down-illegal-encampments-by-homeless-individuals/>.

²² “City Council Adopts Ordinance to Improve Intersection Safety,” City News | City of Melbourne, FL, accessed February 13, 2022, <https://www.melbourneflorida.org/Home/Components/News/News/8189/381>.

²³ “Chapter 46 - Solicitation,” Municode Library (City of Melbourne, Florida), accessed February 13, 2022, https://library.municode.com/fl/melbourne/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICICO_CH46SO.

that would help bolster the community and grow the church. Negative references arose in some city council meetings but generated no formal action as no laws were being broken. Opposition emerged within the church against one senior pastor who welcomed the homeless to church activities. He eventually resigned. Another senior pastor's support caused him to weather some local opposition against himself, yet he remained stalwart in his desire to minister to the less privileged members of the community. The state overseer of the Church of God in Florida has expressed support for the outreach, as has the district bishop in Melbourne. Though their reasons may vary, some have left the church. New growth seems stifled. Healthy boundaries and policies are still being worked out. The general disposition of the church has shifted toward helping the homeless, but there is still some uncertainty about and opposition toward the outreach ministry of Hope Station.

Moving Forward

Hope Station is poised on the threshold of a new chapter of ministry. The new outreach center is open. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be receding. Municipal policy changes and the potential relocation of support services generate significant uncertainty. Financial resources are sufficient for now. Support from church leadership remains strong. There are numerous community resources in every quarter to help assist people experiencing homelessness. However, there is a growing need for more transient housing, case management services, and inpatient addiction treatment. Cooperation is growing between churches and other agencies. Hope abounds.

Problem Presented

Hope Station is an outreach ministry of CCOG. It now primarily ministers to individuals struggling with homelessness and addiction. The ministry grew from a men's ministry breakfast into a community breakfast. The COVID-19 pandemic prohibited holding large gatherings,²⁴ driving the ministry to venture into the homeless camps, to provide meals, Christian hope, encouragement, prayer, and counseling. With the pandemic receding, the ministry now functions primarily in the new outreach center and in providing community breakfast and other meal events.

The development of the ministry is such that the main body of volunteer workers are lay persons who primarily are affiliated with the parent church and other local churches. The ministry's growth tends to produce a subtle but growing shift toward providing services. Patrons often come for material rather than spiritual support. Workers tend to see their part as not ministering spiritually to those who come but rather doing their part by preparing and giving out meals and clothing. Hope, encouragement, prayer, and counseling are increasingly the primary responsibilities of the pastor and other ministry leaders. The problem is that Hope Station's outreach ministry focuses more on providing services than on building hope in Christ.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to disciple Hope Station workers to provide service that focuses on instilling hope in Christ. Hope Station has undergone a paradigm shift toward providing relief services that has resulted in a corresponding loss of focus on the corporate mission of the church to disciple, evangelize, and instill hope in Christ. Many workers

²⁴ Imen Ayouni et al., "Effective Public Health Measures to Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19, 2.

at Hope Station are seasoned Christians who have weathered difficulty and achieved a mature level of spiritual growth. Their participation in preparing and serving meals and providing other forms of material relief lacks a specific focus on either advancing their own spiritual growth or mentoring and stirring spiritual growth in others.

The desperate circumstances of many individuals who are struggling with homelessness and addiction are often overwhelming. Their hopelessness extends to the workers, who find themselves overburdened and hopeless themselves, and unable to inspire hope in others.²⁵ Discipling Hope Station workers to better understand and articulate the nature and sources of Christian hope should raise awareness of the divine origin of true hope, uncover and address sources of hopelessness that affect workers, and better equip them to inspire hope in others.

Basic Assumptions

This action research project embraces the following assumptions:

- Hope Station’s attention to providing meals, clothing, and other relief tends to shift attention away from the essential elements of the Great Commission, namely preaching the gospel and discipleship (see Acts 6:1–3).
- The shift away from evangelism is a widespread challenge among faith-based organizations (FBOs).²⁶
- Government and civic organizations do not focus on spiritual needs.
- Chronic homelessness is intractable and presents existential threats to life and safety.
- Homeless individuals necessarily gravitate toward immediate, tangible solutions. Hope is essential to sustained recovery.
- Eternal hope is only found in Jesus Christ.
- Respondents are generally honest in their responses.
- Issues related to homelessness are common, and many are systemic.
- Solutions that benefit Hope Station may help other groups and may be beneficially applied throughout the community.

²⁵ Cecil Bradfield, Mary Lou Wylie, and Lennis G. Echterling, “After the Flood: The Response of Ministers to a Natural Disaster,” *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 397–407, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711225>.

²⁶ Thomas Watenweiler, “Insights Into the Tensions Facing Western Christians Working Overseas in an Educational Faith-Based Organization, a Case Study,” *Transformation* vol. 35, no. 4, 236.

Definitions

Agency in the context of hope refers to the person or organization that sustains movement toward a goal.²⁷ It is a capable and willful mover toward the completion of the goal. Pathways represent successful routes to attain a goal or the perceived ability to generate them.²⁸ Both are fundamental elements of hope as defined by C. R. Snyder, professor of psychology at the University of Kansas.²⁹

Christian hope is the patient, shameless, confident, and overcoming expectation of good from God through Jesus Christ that is born of personal or vicarious suffering through tribulation, and stems from confidence in God's will, God's ability, and God's faithfulness to act through the specific ability, volition, and active intervention of Himself or other causal agents to bring about good along a viable pathway³⁰ in order to produce a desired, certain, and positive end.

Chronic homelessness is defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as living in a shelter or place not intended for human habitation.³¹ Chronic, in this case, represents a constant or repetitive condition for a cumulative period of a year or more within three years.³² Chronic homelessness is also, by definition, complicated (and

²⁷ R. K. Rajandram, S. M. Ho, and N. Samman, "Interaction of Hope and Optimism with Anxiety and Depression in a Specific Group of Cancer Survivors: A Preliminary Study," *BMC Res Notes* 4, 519 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1186/1756-0500-4-519>, 1–2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Mackenzie L. Shanahan, Ian C. Fischer, and Kevin L. Rand, "Hope, Optimism, and Affect as Predictors and Consequences of Expectancies: The Potential Moderating Roles of Perceived Control and Success," *Journal of Research in Personality* 84 (February 1, 2020): 103903, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2019.103903>, 1.

³⁰ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, "Interaction of Hope and Optimism," 5.

³¹ "Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing: Defining 'Chronically Homeless,'" *Federal Register* vol. 80, No. 233 / Friday, December 4, 2015 / Rules and Regulations 75791 (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 4, 2015), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2015-12-04/pdf/2015-30473.pdf>

³² *Ibid.*

perpetuated) by substance abuse, mental illness, or developmental disability,³³ though this is not always true.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a disease caused by a coronavirus that was discovered in 2019. It causes severe acute respiratory distress syndrome (SARS) and is also called SARS-CoV-2.³⁴ It precipitated a global pandemic with the emergence of many variant strains of the virus that caused widespread illness and millions of human deaths worldwide.³⁵

Eudaimonic well-being is an improved state of being related to discovering individual meaning and purpose.³⁶ Psychology generally recognizes this as a key type of well-being that is linked to achieving an improved existence. It is differentiated from hedonic well-being, which is associated with experiencing pleasure and enjoyment.

Hedonic well-being stems from experiencing pleasure and enjoyment.³⁷ Psychology generally recognizes this as a key type of well-being that is associated with experiencing pleasure and enjoyment. It is differentiated from eudaimonic well-being, which is associated with discovering individual meaning and purpose.

Hope is an expectation of good stemming from confidence in the specific ability, volition, and active intervention of causal agents to bring about good along a viable pathway.³⁸ Hope is often used interchangeably with optimism as a synonymous term. This research benefits

³³ “Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing: Defining ‘Chronically Homeless.’”

³⁴ “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (February 25, 2021), <https://www.cdc.gov/dotw/covid-19/index.html>.

³⁵ “WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed September 13, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/>.

³⁶ Shanahan, “Hope, Optimism, and Affect,” 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

from a more specific differentiation of hope from optimism by its contribution to overall well-being having a definite association with a particular agency and pathway to an improved state.

Optimism is a generalized anticipation of a positive outcome without regard for agency or pathways.³⁹ Optimism is often used interchangeably with hope as a synonymous term. This research benefits from a more specific differentiation of optimism from hope, with its contribution to overall well-being having no association with a particular agency or pathway to an improved state.

Limitations

Participants are subject to difficult circumstances that may limit their full or continued participation. Their existential needs and availability limit contact time and follow-up with homeless participants. Inhibitions and restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic reduce and limit participation. The location and availability of community resources varies and is difficult to predict. This variability affects the ability of anyone reliant upon these resources to participate in the study thoroughly.

Homeless transients include single and married adults who are childless or away from their children. This is for many reasons. Families with minor children may receive focused governmental housing assistance. Many children are removed and sheltered by child protective service agencies. Families with minor children may struggle to hide their homelessness.

Hope Station ministry efforts that are off-site are sporadic and scattered. Communication with and among people experiencing homelessness is hampered by transience, the lack of phone service and transportation, the absence of electric power, and the diverse locations and service

³⁹ Conn Nugent, "Optimism versus Hope," *Conservation Biology* 21, no. 6 (2007), 2.

times of assistance providers. The completion and opening of Hope Station's outreach center brought more centralization, stability, and consistency for the ministry and may subsequently enhance the efficacy of this action research project.

Delimitations

The context for this action research project is Hope Station. The scope is limited to staff and volunteers of Hope Station and to patrons of Hope Station ministries who are struggling with chronic homelessness and addiction. Participation is limited to adults who provide informed consent. The ministry population is limited to the Melbourne area.

Thesis Statement

Hope Station patrons and workers are experiencing hopelessness. It extends from their exposure to the desperate circumstances of individuals struggling with homelessness and addiction.⁴⁰ This makes them feel powerless to effect lasting change. It weighs upon their own difficulties. It makes them feel vulnerable themselves and ill-equipped to inspire hope in others.⁴¹

Pinpointing the true nature of Christian hope, and its dependence upon divine agency should help both workers and patrons view difficulties through the lens of the inspiring hope that Christ provides. Hope Station workers must understand and differentiate between general optimism and true hope in Christ. This will help them discover their own sources of hopelessness and find greater hope amid their own personal circumstances. They will then be better prepared to recognize hopelessness and inspire hope in others. If Hope Station workers experience hands-

⁴⁰ Tatsushi Hirono and Michelle Emery Blake, "The Role of Religious Leaders in the Restoration of Hope Following Natural Disasters," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 2158244017707003, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017707003>, 7

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

on discipleship that strengthens their own hope in Christ, their present focus on providing services will move toward a future emphasis on inspiring Christian hope in others.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This DMIN action research project aims to contribute meaningfully to the conversation about hope as applied in a ministry context. This drives a need to review what has been and is being said in theological, professional, and academic literature. This is, in part, to determine if relevant themes in this project have already been addressed and partly to find any relevant gaps in the literature that may still exist and need to be addressed. The following is a review of current scholarly research on relevant themes of hope.

Literature Review

What is hope? Define it. Boil it down to the basics. As it turns out, there is not a lot of agreement about what hope is. Within theology, psychology, and Christianity, among institutions, denominations, and even within local churches, there seems to be a lack of clarity and agreement on what hope is.¹ The lack of clarity within Christianity may be due, in part, to the use of different passages and the varying interpretation of examples and descriptions of hope found within the Scriptures,² the interchangeable use of hope and optimism,³ and, in part, to the assimilation of modern psychology within Christianity. Many definitions emerge in academic and professional literature, but they paint an ambiguous portrait that is temporal at best. The

¹Bruce Wydick, Robert Dowd, and Travis J. Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty in Oaxaca, Mexico,” December 27, 2016, 2, https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer_public/e3/3e/e33e56e6-76e8-404d-82d7-1d51f347900d/hope__human_dignity_dowd_lybbert__wydick_12-27-16.pdf.

² Ibid., 1.

³ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 1.

understanding of hope appears limited to a temporal rather than an eternal scope by the philosophical horizons of the authors and their disciplines. Many focus on the desire for temporal well-being and avoid deeper themes of eternal value and ultimate purpose.

Why Hope?

Researchers investigating intractable issues, specifically, intractable conflicts, find that hope is the most relevant positive emotion to bring about change in attitudes among groups.⁴ They find that positive emotions such as pride do not necessarily promote harmonious relations or conflict resolution.⁵ They also find that joy and happiness, which are triggered by events and involve high levels of certainty, are less helpful than hope in negative situations that involve uncertainty.⁶ It is important to note that these authors referred to joy and happiness synonymously and did not acknowledge the deeper elements of joy that differentiate it from happiness among Christians.⁷ Many of the same researchers working in a similar study find that empathy raises support for ideas while hope bolsters support for solutions.⁸ They conclude that hope creates a positive effect even in negative situations with high levels of uncertainty and little control.⁹ They find that advocates need to be aware of how individuals with different ideologies perceive expressions of hope as they search for ways to increase hope among groups.¹⁰ They

⁴ Smadar Cohen-Chen et al., “Dealing in Hope: Does Observing Hope Expressions Increase Conciliatory Attitudes in Intergroup Conflict?,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 83 (July 2019): 102–11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2019.04.002>, 109.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pamela Ebstyn King and Frederic Defoy, “Joy as a Virtue: The Means and Ends of Joy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 2020, vol. 48, No. 4, 309.

⁸ Nimrod Rosler, Smadar Cohen-Cohen, Eran Halperin, “The Distinctive Effects of Empathy and Hope in Intractable Conflicts,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017, vol. 61, no. 1, 131.

⁹ Smadar et. al., “Dealing in Hope,” 109.

¹⁰ Ibid.

caution that their research is in conflict resolution but encourage research into the benefits of building hope in other contexts.¹¹

Carlos Laranjeira and Ana Querido find that hope and optimism, while often used interchangeably, are separate constructs relying on different mechanisms that shape behavior.¹² They describe optimism as more generalized while hope rests upon identifiable goals, agency, and pathways.¹³ Significantly, Bruininks and Malle find that people associate optimism with general outcomes, while they experience hope as an emotion tied to issues that are more personally significant and emotionally relevant to them.¹⁴ They also differentiate it from wishing, in that hope is associated with issues of greater importance that people are committed to and continue to invest cognitive and emotional energy in and strive toward even if the outcome seems unlikely.¹⁵ One Christian participant in this action research project described wishing as generally associated with worldly desires, whereas hope is more associated with faith in God. Hope is “rooted in trust experiences and the attachment to other people (family and friends), related to spiritual and religious faith, which goes beyond rational knowledge, and the intimate connection to a benevolent higher power.”¹⁶ Levels of hope are often shaped by psychosocial conditions, including social support, and success in and care directed at reaching goals and

¹¹ Smadar et. al., “Dealing in Hope,” 109.

¹² Carlos Laranjeira and Ana Querido, “Hope and Optimism as an Opportunity to Improve the ‘Positive Mental Health’ Demand,” *Frontiers in Psychology* Vol 13. No. 827320, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.82730, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ Patricia Bruininks and Bertram F. Malle, “Distinguishing Hope from Optimism and Related Affective States,” *Motivation and Emotion*, vol. 29, no. 4, Dec 2005, DOI: 10.1007/s11031-006-9010-4, 330.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁶ A. M. Krafft, T. Guse, and D. Marce, “Distinguishing Perceived Hope and Dispositional Optimism: Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Findings Beyond Future Expectancies and Cognition,” *Journal of Well-Being Assessment*, 220, 2021, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41543-020-00030-4>.

facing stress.¹⁷ They say that hope “promotes overall mental health and may help heal specific conditions including severe mental illness, suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders.”¹⁸ It is also influenced by environment and physiological factors (stress hormones, immune mediators, and neurotransmitters)¹⁹. It promotes wellbeing more effectively than optimism or self-efficacy.²⁰

Hope is more significant to recovery than many other emotions and traits. By showing genuine compassion, alleviating suffering, sharing biblical truth, and exhibiting deeply held Christian hope, Hope Station and similar ministries can inspire individuals and groups struggling with addiction and homelessness to seek positive change. They can help create an environment that promotes hope, mental health, and cognitive restructuring that benefits from the “positive aspects of everyday situations”²¹ and from “simple daily actions that boost mental strength, even in the midst of uncertainty such as currently faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.”²² Building hope among the leaders and workers of Hope Station and similar ministries may help them better convey hope within their ministry context.

Defining Hope

Hope is difficult to define. This is admitted by researchers Dr. Tatsushi Hirono and Dr. Michelle Blake from Austin Peay State University, who examined the role of religious leaders,

¹⁷ Carlos Laranjeira and Ana Querido, “Hope and Optimism as an Opportunity to Improve the ‘Positive Mental Health’ Demand,” 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid.

including Christian and Buddhist clergy, in restoring hope after a natural disaster.²³ They describe hope as “a life force needed to promote physical and psychological health and the ability to function as an individual.”²⁴

In their research on couples therapy, David Ward, Pacific Lutheran University, and Dr. Karen Wampler, Michigan State University,²⁵ describe hope as “a belief and a feeling that a desired outcome is possible.”²⁶ They find hope to be an essential factor in the change process, though not the most important. They echo the assertion of Thomas L. Sexton, Indiana University, that hope is part of a set of therapeutic factors that is “not conceptually clear, operationally defined, or contextualized within a clinical process enough to make them researchable or understandable.”²⁷ Ward and Wampler find that none of the authors cited in their research significantly contributed to “better defining and understanding the concept of hope.”²⁸

Researchers Bruce Wydick and Robert Dowd, both with the University of Notre Dame, and Travis Lybbert, University of California, studied hope and human dignity in poverty. They identify different components of hope, including “aspirations, agency, and conceptualization of pathways.”²⁹ They find that in the Judeo-Christian worldview, where “human agency plays a central role,”³⁰ hope is “a force for good and a source of inspiration, motivation, and even

²³ Hirono and Blake, “The Role of Religious Leaders in the Restoration of Hope,” 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David B. Ward and Karen S. Wampler, “Moving up the Continuum of Hope: Developing a Theory of Hope and Understanding Its Influence in Couples Therapy,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 36, no. 2 (2010): 212–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00173.x>, 212.

²⁶ Ward and Wampler, “Moving up the Continuum of Hope,” 216.

²⁷ Thomas L. Sexton, Charles R. Ridley, and Amy J. Kleiner, “Beyond Common Factors: Multilevel-Process Models of Therapeutic Change in Marriage and Family Therapy,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 30, no. 2 (2004): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2004.tb01229.x>.

²⁸ Ward and Wampler, “Moving up the Continuum of Hope,” 213.

²⁹ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 9.

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

salvation.”³¹ The above descriptions of hope’s significance, components, and attributes provide an incomplete picture of what hope is, especially for the Christian.

Researchers studying dignity therapy in cancer patients define hope as “believing in positive outcomes following adverse events in life and developing solutions to achieve goals.”³² Other researchers studying hope and optimism in cancer survivors formally define hope as “a positive motivational state” with two components, agency and pathways,³³ echoing, as Wydick and Dowd above, an often-quoted definition of hope by C. R. Snyder, professor of psychology at the University of Kansas who specialized in positive psychology, as “one’s perceived ability to accomplish goals” comprising “two interrelated cognitive processes: pathways ... and agency.”³⁴ Fred B. Bryant, PhD, professor of psychology at Loyola University, and Jamie A. Cvigros, PhD, specialist in clinical psychology at Rush Medical College, embellished Snyder’s definition above by adding that hope is “a multi-dimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which is realistically possible and personally significant.”³⁵ They describe hope as consisting of two spheres: *generalized*, which forms an “intangible umbrella ... casting a positive glow on life,” and *particularized*, which is toward a specific object or outcome.³⁶ Finally, Abigail Lucas, MS, graduate student, and Edward

³¹ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 9.

³² Hossein Rahimi, Nasim Mehrpooya, Seyyed Abolfazl Vagharseyyedin, and Zahra Karimi, “Dignity Therapy Improves Hope and Quality of Life in Cancer Patients: A Randomized Clinical Trial,” *Journal of Advances in Medical and Biomedical Research* 28, no. 128 (2020): 156–65, <https://doi.org/10.30699/jams.28.128>, 156.

³³ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 1–2.

³⁴ Shanahan, “Hope, Optimism, and Affect,” 1.

³⁵ Fred B. Bryant and Jamie A. Cvigros, “Distinguishing Hope and Optimism: Two Sides of a Coin or Two Separate Coins?” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 23, no. 2 (04, 2004): 273–302, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fdistinguishing-hope-optimism-two-sides-coin%2Fdocview%2F224677707%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>, 278.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

C. Chang, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, rephrase Snyder's definition as "the ability to motivate oneself to achieve a self-determined goal" with the corresponding subcomponents of agency and pathways.³⁷

It is necessary in this context to define agency and pathways. Whether human or divine, "agency is the motivational component of hope used to initiate and sustain the movement toward achieving a goal."³⁸ Agency typically refers to a person, often the person in crisis. However, it can be another person or organization actively and capably working to move the hopeful one toward the desired end (Jer 29:11). Pathways refers to "the perceived ability in generating successful routes to attain the given goal."³⁹ Note that pathways include not only routes of success but the ability to generate them. Agency is the positive mover, and pathways are how to get there. Hope, in the scholarly descriptions above, includes both.

The Reality of Hope

John Paley of the University of Worcester argues that hope is a non-entity⁴⁰ and that its attributes are arbitrary.⁴¹ He declares that it does not exist as an inner power, life force, theological virtue, or universal human phenomenon.⁴² He does not regard it even as an emotion,⁴³

³⁷ Abigael G. Lucas, Edward C. Chang, Jerin Lee, and Jameson K. Hirsch, "Positive Expectancies for the Future as Potential Protective Factors of Suicide Risk in Adults: Does Optimism and Hope Predict Suicidal Behaviors in Primary Care Patients?" *International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction* 18, no. 1 (February 2020): 41–53, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-018-9922-8>, 42.

³⁸ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, "Interaction of Hope and Optimism," 1–2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John Paley, "Hope, Positive Illusions and Palliative Rehabilitation," *Progress in Palliative Care*, Dec 2014, Vol. 22, No. 6, 361.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 358.

mechanism, power, or attribute.⁴⁴ He argues extensively and logically that it does not really exist as anything more than a grammatical inference or reference to something that is desired.⁴⁵ Whether used as a noun or a verb hope always takes an object, whether explicit or implied. For Paley, it is the object that exists, not hope itself. To hope *for* something or *in* something makes hope a grammatical tool that points to *something* that really exists as an attribute, desire, or outcome. Referencing Ludwig Wittgenstein, he argues that to see hope as a thing is the bewitching of our intelligence through our language.⁴⁶ He continues that hope is not something that can be seen and has no observable process or outcome.⁴⁷ He identifies four conditions of hope: that the hopeful one desires something, that they believe it is possible, that they understand that certain factors might prevent it, and that they believe they have no control over these factors.⁴⁸ With these conditions, he departs from Snyder and others to build his own definition of hope. His second condition might mirror Snyder's definition of pathways but the fourth disagrees with Snyder's definition of agency by stating that the hopeful one has no control over the factors that surround their hope. His definition disregards other scholarly definitions of hope and equates hope with optimism.

At the least, hope is an attribute, an emotion, and an inner strength. It is as tangible as anger, malice, or fear that can thoroughly alter one's mental and physical state and either paralyze them or drive them to action. Paley is right though that hope, stripped of its Christian trappings becomes hollow and almost unintelligible.⁴⁹ The Psalmist boldly proclaimed, "Why art

⁴⁴ Paley, "Hope, Positive Illusions and Palliative Rehabilitation," 360.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁴⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

⁴⁷ Paley, "Hope, positive illusions and palliative rehabilitation," 361.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God” (Ps 42:5a, KJV). Hope thou in God! It is the intrepid declaration of the source of Christian hope. Without God spirituality becomes superstition, dying well becomes fatalism, and hope becomes wishful thinking.

The Significance of the Object of Hope

Hope can have a variety of objects, sources, agents, and pathways. Hope can be a general disposition over a broad spectrum of struggle, or a plurality of particularized hopes that anticipate improved states along multiple pathways toward multiple goals. Hope can either motivate individuals toward change or help them find contentment in a better disposition toward their present circumstances. Researchers studying the effect of hope-inducing strategies among disadvantaged groups in societal conflicts have identified what they refer to as a “dark side of hope,” wherein an improved disposition toward more advantaged groups decreases motivation for change.⁵⁰ They find that more optimistic perceptions of advantaged groups can deter action, especially if disadvantaged groups become disillusioned when their expectations are unmet.⁵¹ They caution that mere hope for conciliatory harmony may fail to move disadvantaged groups to address issues that create the disadvantage.⁵² They also caution that advantaged groups could promote harmony to maintain the status quo.⁵³ A concerning finding is that the authors find anger against advantaged groups to be a beneficial motivating factor.⁵⁴ O. A. Leshem states that

⁵⁰ Siwar Hasan-Aslih, Ruthie Pliskin, Martijn van Zomeren, Eran Halperin, and Tamar Saguy, “A Darker Side of Hope: Harmony-Focused Hope Decreases Collective Action Intentions Among the Disadvantaged,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 2019, vol. 45, no. 2, 2018: 219.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 220

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“political realists” point to the struggle between Athens and the Island of Melos to show the “delusional qualities” of hope where misplaced hopes lead the islanders to defeat and slavery.⁵⁵

Victor Frankl’s vivid portrayal of the psychological struggles experienced during and after internment in the Nazi concentration camps exposes a seminal human need for purpose and meaning in hope. He describes the loss of the will to live that followed the loss of hope.⁵⁶ He explains that as survivors suddenly began to experience the relief of their suffering that came with food, clothing, medicine, rest, human compassion, and even returning home they found their comforts meaningless in the aftermath absent any purpose for their continued living.⁵⁷ He found they needed an object of hope to press toward,⁵⁸ whether it was reunification with loved ones, achieving life goals, or facing suffering and death with purpose and dignity.⁵⁹ His account also shows the shifting nature of hope’s horizon. As individuals travel through events and circumstances, they find new mileposts to set their hopes on and experience the personal growth that comes with either surviving disappointment or realizing the incremental achievement of their hopes.

The significance of this research to Hope Station and similar ministries is the need to clearly identify the nature and object of hope, not merely promote hope for hope’s sake. False or misplaced hopes do not reveal the dangers of hope itself but rather show the need to have a sure basis for hope. It also seems that merely ameliorating group tensions and inducing hope for more

⁵⁵ O. A. Leshem, “The Merits and Dangers of Hope,” *Hope Amidst Conflict: Philosophical and Psychological Exploration*, (Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197685303.003.0002>, 28.

⁵⁶ Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1992), 37–39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42–44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 35–38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

harmonious relationships between advantaged groups and individuals facing homelessness and addiction can lead to disaffection and disillusionment. Hope-inducing strategies should clearly identify the object of hope and focus on moving disadvantaged individuals and groups toward beneficial change.

Hope versus Christian Hope

Following the scholarly definitions presented above, this literature review will define “hope” as an expectation of good stemming from confidence in the ability, volition, and active intervention of causal agents to bring about good along a viable pathway. These causal agents are varied. That there is a variety of sources that can drive hope agrees with the scholarly definitions above. It is biblically sound as there is also a differentiation within Scripture as to vain hope (Job 41:9; Prov 11:7, and others) and a hope that does not make ashamed,⁶⁰ (Rom 5:5) one found in God (Ps 16:9; 31:24; 33:33; 38:15; 39:7; 42:11; 43:5; 71:5, and many others), a well-placed hope that will not lead to disappointment.⁶¹

In psychology, hope is a value-neutral trait⁶² akin to optimism coupled with human agency and pathways to bring about positive change.⁶³ More recent research has sought to identify and define “virtuous hope” to expand traditional scholarly definitions of hope beyond Snyder’s Hope Theory.⁶⁴ These researchers stumble in their attempts to identify hope as a virtue

⁶⁰ D. R. Denton, “The Biblical Basis of Hope,” *Themelios* vol. 5 no. 3 (1980), 21.

⁶¹ David E. Garland, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 190, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶² Kendra Thomas, Musawenkosi Namntu, and Stephanie Ebert, “Virtuous Hope: Moral Exemplars, Hope Theory, and the Centrality of Adversity and Support,” *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology* (2023) no. 8, 169.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Thomas, Namntu, and Ebert, “Virtuous Hope,” 169.

within a purely secular construct by supporting their assertions with quotes from theologians such as Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁵ They seek to identify moral exemplars without establishing ethical or empirical boundaries for morality and offering no clear differentiation of good from evil above an assumed innate disposition toward individual or collective enlightenment and betterment.⁶⁶ They qualify presumably beneficent acts performed with no apparent personal gain as examples of exemplary morality that evidence an underlying virtuous hope.⁶⁷

Oded Adomi Leshem is a political psychologist who studied the value and influence of hope in cultures facing intractable conflicts. He cites the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict as perhaps the most intractable of conflicts.⁶⁸ He identifies the lack of hope for peace as a factor to protracted conflict driven by the belief the conflict itself is unresolvable.⁶⁹ He points to the psychological costs of the uncertainty of hope, the social expectations of hope, and the demand for time and commitment to pursue what is hoped for.⁷⁰ He describes skepticism as potentially beneficial when it insulates from disappointment, frustration, and desperation,⁷¹ yet warns that it could be one of the primary drivers of the status quo.⁷² Pointing to the dangers of hopelessness and resignation the author argues for “optimal hope” that desires, but does not expect beneficial change.⁷³ Optimizing hope entails separating desires from expectations, maximizing benefits, minimizing drawbacks, and building on truthful examination rather than relying on the

⁶⁵ Thomas, Namntu, and Ebert, “Virtuous Hope,” 171.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 172–73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶⁸ O. A. Leshem, *The Merits and Dangers of Hope*, 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17.

anticipation of achievement.⁷⁴ While seeking to be sensible, pragmatic, and realistic optimal hope rests more on desires, wishes, and aspirations than the likelihood of achievement.⁷⁵ He was not the first to argue for pragmatic hope. John Stuart Mill discusses hope within a framework of what he calls practical wisdom, not thinking perpetually about what one cannot change and giving greater prominence in thought to those things that can be altered by one's own conduct.⁷⁶ While Leshem argues about the possibility of hope amid conflict, this paper suggests that conflict—the disparity between what is and what is desirable—is the crucible in which hope is formed. Lacking a desire for a better state means there is no need for hope. “Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom 8:24,d KJV). It is the desire for a better state that creates a need for hope.⁷⁷ Otherwise, a person merely faces a struggle to find contentment within their circumstances.

For the Christian, hope is anchored in divine agency built upon the character, love, and beneficent will of God the Father;⁷⁸ the virtue, historical achievements, and future reign of Jesus Christ;⁷⁹ and the present righteous influence and active work of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ It is anchored in God's good will toward man as an expression of His love for man. The use of good will

⁷⁴ O. A. Leshem, *The Merits and Dangers of Hope*, 40.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Theism* (Jonathan Bennet, 2017), 38, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/mill1873d.pdf>

⁷⁷ Emma Pleeging, Martijn Burger, and Job van Exel, “The Relations Between Hope and Subjective Well-Being: a Literature Overview and Empirical Analysis,” *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 2021, vol. 16, 1020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-019-09802-4>.

⁷⁸ Marcel Uwineza, “On Christian Hope: What Makes it Distinctive and Credible?” *America*, 2020, 4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344641395_On_Christian_Hope_What_makes_it_distinctive_and_credible.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Bruce J. Nicholls, Ed., “Faith and Hope for the Future,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 21, January 1997: 3–31, <https://theology.worldidea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ERT-21-1.pdf>, 8.

(purpose, intent, and volition that is beneficent) here is not an attempt to coin a new phrase, though it is purposely differentiated from goodwill (a kind disposition). God’s good will is not just His benevolent sentiment and opinion. It is His actionable volition that proceeds from His righteous and just intent backed by His omnipotent ability to act.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jer 29:11, KJV). These words present a biblical definition of hope that is nearly identical to Snyder’s except that it offers something that Snyder’s hope cannot promise—a future. God identifies Himself as the Divine Agent of good will who is promising His volitional commitment to propel the believer toward a better state along a viable pathway that He identifies as His plan. While Snyder admits that the presence of hope does not necessitate actual achievement of the desired end or the realization of a certain future in an improved state,⁸¹ God promises exactly that. God assures the believer that His plan will not only move them toward an improved state of existence, but that His plan guarantees on His own divine character, ability, integrity, reputation, and trustworthiness that they will arrive there and enjoy a perpetual and joyous existence in that improved state (Jer 29:11–14). This element of Christian hope transcends secular hope and optimism and gives the believer a basis for hope that is unshaken by present circumstances or even death itself (Job 19:25–29; John 14:27–29; Phil 1:6; Heb 2:14–15).

While Snyder’s causal agent is usually the hopeful one moving their self toward their desired state along what they perceive to be a viable pathway,⁸² the believer’s hope is purposely and specifically not vested in himself nor tied to his own plans. Christian hope is in God. “I

⁸¹ C. R. Snyder, “Target Article: Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind,” *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 249–75, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1304_01, 267.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 251–52.

depend on God alone; I put my hope in Him. He alone protects and saves me; He is my defender, and I shall never be defeated” (Ps 62:5, Good News Translation). Believers place their hope in God alone and are admonished not to trust in their own plans (Ps 42:11; Prov 3:5–6; 28:26; Jer 17:5).

The hope of God’s benevolent volition extends to all believers. God says that if His people humble themselves, pray, and seek Him, He will act (2 Chron 7:14).⁸³ He is not saying here that if His people are kindly disposed to act, He will also be. He is saying if His people act according to His will, He will act. Some will argue that the promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 is only to Israel.⁸⁴ However, other scriptures show that divine agency extends to all believers. At the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples that those who believe in Him will do great works, and He will do whatever they ask in His name (John 14:12–14). John also wrote that believers receive whatever they ask of Him because they keep his commandments and do those things that please Him (1 John 3:22). Believers in this context are those who repent out of a pure heart and good conscience and exercise a sincere unhypocritical faith in the objective truth of the gospel⁸⁵ that Jesus Christ is the Son of God bringing everlasting life (1 Tim 1:3, 15–17).

This literature review will define Christian hope as the patient, shameless, confident, and overcoming expectation of good from God through Jesus Christ that is born of personal or vicarious suffering through tribulation and stems from confidence in God’s will, God’s ability, and God’s faithfulness to act through the specific ability, volition, and active intervention of

⁸³ Louis C. Jonker, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: 1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), accessed February 17, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central,

⁸⁴ Frederick Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 213, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Himself or other causal agents to bring about good along a viable pathway⁸⁶ in order to produce a desired, certain, and positive end. God states His good will to act in that He has thoughts of peace, not evil, to bring about a future and a hope (Jer 29:11–13). Though, as above, some will contend that this promise is only to Israel, it has been embraced through the centuries since the Babylonian exile as a promise of hope to believers facing suffering and calamity.⁸⁷ It is anchored with other promises in a biblical context that spans testaments and extends to all believers. King David wrote centuries before Jeremiah’s time of God’s thorough knowledge of him and His many benevolent thoughts toward him (Ps 40:5; 139:1–6, 17–18). Centuries after Jeremiah, Jesus told his followers that God cares for and provides for them, even numbering the hairs on their heads (Matt 6:25–33; 10:29–31). He said that God’s love drives His willful actions to save man (John 3:16), to abide with man (John 14:23), and eternally know man (John 17:3). The apostle Paul proclaims God’s ability to act in that God is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph 3:20, NKJV). Paul also declares God’s faithfulness to act in that He is faithful to complete the good work He has begun in the saints (Phil 1:6). “Christian hope,” then, is an expectation of good that is driven by confidence in God’s will to bring about good, His ability to bring about good, and His faithfulness to see it through.

⁸⁶ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

⁸⁷ Mary Callaway, *Jeremiah through the Centuries* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020), 244–45.

Hope versus Optimism

Hope and optimism are often used interchangeably in general conversation and social services contexts. They are not synonymous.⁸⁸ With a closer look, some significant differences arise. Both theoretical and empirical research differentiate hope and optimism based on where positive expectancies proceed from.⁸⁹ They are separate constructs dependent upon different mechanisms.⁹⁰ Hope motivates action toward a controllable outcome, while optimism inspires an expectant patience to cope with uncontrollable outcomes.⁹¹ Where optimism may merely anticipate a positive outcome, hope drives individuals toward specific goals.⁹² Hope actively drives “problem-focused coping strategies,” while optimism “is more passive and emotion-focused.”⁹³

Optimism is a generalized expectation of good with no agency or intervention in view and does not need to be directed at any particular object or outcome. It just provides “a stable tendency to believe that good rather than bad things will happen.”⁹⁴ It is “the recognition that odds are in your favor.”⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Hadas Marciano, Yohanan Eshel, Shaul Kimhi, and Bruria Adini, “Hope and Fear of Threats as Predictors of Coping with Two Major Adversities, the COVID-19 Pandemic and an Armed Conflict,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2022, Vol. 190.): 1124, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031123>.

⁸⁹ Shanahan, “Hope, Optimism, and Affect,” 1.

⁹⁰ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

⁹¹ Shanahan, “Hope, Optimism, and Affect,” 2.

⁹² Bryant and Cvendros, “Distinguishing Hope and Optimism,” 273.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

⁹⁵ Nugent, “Optimism versus Hope,” *Conservation Biology* 21, no. 6 (2007), 2.

Researchers “accumulating evidence from a variety of sources” find that individuals benefit both physically and psychologically from an optimistic disposition.⁹⁶ Optimism has been associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular events, respiratory illness, depression, anxiety, and anger.⁹⁷ The physical benefits are even associated with exceptional longevity with greater numbers of both men and women living past eighty-five.⁹⁸ Lucas and Chang report research to support the idea that greater optimism leads to a greater capacity to adjust psychologically and cope emotionally.⁹⁹ Significantly, while optimism may focus on actions that tend toward a positive outcome,¹⁰⁰ only the hopeful expectancy of good drives any persistence toward particular goals.¹⁰¹

Hope rests upon agency and pathways and emphasizes positive personal motivation.¹⁰² Agency and pathways need not be definite to differentiate hope from optimism. Agency can arise from a variety of sources and be either human or divine, and pathways can be either practical or unrealistic. The anticipation of progressive intervention alone is sufficient to characterize the expectation of good as hope.

⁹⁶ Michael W. Bridges, “Distinguishing Optimism from Neuroticism (and Trait Anxiety, Self-Mastery, and Self-Esteem): A Reevaluation of the Life Orientation Test,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67, no. 6 (1994), 1063.

⁹⁷ Lewina O. Lee et al., “Optimism is Associated with Exceptional Longevity in 2 Epidemiologic Cohorts of Men and Women,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Aug 26, 2018, vol. 116, no. 27, www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1900712116, 18357.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18359.

⁹⁹ Lucas, “Positive Expectancies for the Future,” 42.

¹⁰⁰ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Hope and optimism are each beneficial in coping and reducing depression.¹⁰³ Hope tends to promote eudaimonic well-being that pertains to finding meaning and purpose.¹⁰⁴ This is significant as meaning and purpose are objective and well-defined within Christianity (e.g., Eph 1:9–12). In a secular sense, though, meaning and purpose are entirely internal and personal, and no objective external standard for them exists at all or is allowable within humanism. This adds challenges to counselors and therapists who wish to promote eudaimonic well-being through secular hopes. Conversely, optimism tends to promote hedonic well-being that is experiential and pertains to finding pleasure and enjoyment.¹⁰⁵ Experts deem optimism’s generalized positive outlook beneficial as they do hope’s confidence in a particular agency and pathway to a better outcome.

Individual and Communal Hope

Researchers from Haifa University and Tel Aviv University studied fear and hope in the Israeli-Jewish society among undergraduates at three Israeli universities.¹⁰⁶ They sought to correlate the influence of certain dependent and independent variables on personal and collective levels of fear and hope. They demonstrated that personal and communal fear and hope exist and are influenced distinctly and at different levels.¹⁰⁷ Some factors affected individual levels of hope and fear more or less than collective ones. They also found that participants were more emotionally affected by collective experiences than personal ones. This is relevant to the

¹⁰³ Rajandram, Ho, and Samman, “Interaction of Hope and Optimism,” 5.

¹⁰⁴ Shanahan, “Hope, Optimism, and Affect,” 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,” 2.

¹⁰⁶ Eran Halperin et al., “Emotions in Conflict: Correlates of Fear and Hope in the Israeli-Jewish Society,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 14, no. 3 (August 2008): 233–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10781910802229157>, 233.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

ministry of Hope Station in at least two ways. Patrons often experience addiction and homelessness in groups, rather than in isolation. Though Hope Station workers try to interact with patrons on a personal level, most ministry activity takes place on a group level. Even when individual drivers of homelessness and addiction seem intractable, patron experiences on a group level can be expected to have a significant emotional effect and group dynamics can be expected to play a significant role in the development of hope within the community.

Hope and Fear

Though conflict and suffering are the crucible in which hope is formed, fear competes with and undermines hope. Political marketing researchers find that the vivid nature of fear causes personally relevant and sufficiently severe fears to be more powerful than hope.¹⁰⁸ Other researchers studying the influence of hope and fear in major adversities find that hope is a more consistent and powerful predictor of well-being, individual and societal resilience, depression, and anxiety.¹⁰⁹ It seems that hope and fear may even present an inverse and perhaps inversely proportional effect on individuals and groups. Halperin et al., find that specific factors that increase levels of fear also reduce levels of hope.¹¹⁰ Deeply rooted collective memories insulate individuals and groups from changes in the level of fear and hope due to life experiences and political orientation.¹¹¹ Individuals living with Holocaust survivors are less subject to collective

¹⁰⁸ Iain Blacka, Paul Baines, Ning Baines, Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, and Roger Mortimore, “The Dynamic Interplay of Hope vs Fear Appeals in a Referendum Context,” *Journal of Political Marketing* 2023, vol. 22, 145, no. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2021.1892900>.

¹⁰⁹ Hadas Marciano et al., “Hope and Fear of Threats as Predictors of Coping with Two Major Adversities, the COVID-19 Pandemic and an Armed Conflict,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2022, vol. 190, 1123, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031123>.

¹¹⁰ Eran Halperin, et al., “Emotions in Conflict,” 251.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 252.

fear and more resilient in responding to threatening events.¹¹² They also find that, “Hope liberates people from fixed—and fixating—beliefs about the irreconcilability of the conflict to find creative ways to resolve it. It enables them to imagine a future that is different from the past and present and motivates them to change their situation ...”¹¹³ Conversely, they find, “Fear sensitizes people to threatening cues, causes overestimation of danger, adherence to known situations, and avoidance of uncertain ones.”¹¹⁴ They conclude that fear limits individual and collective perspectives by “binding the present to past experiences related to the conflict, and by building expectations for the future exclusively on the basis of the past.”¹¹⁵ These findings are relevant to the ministry of Hope Station and all believers who face ministry among groups facing intractable struggles. Believers are constantly warned throughout Scripture to not be afraid, to not fear. Fear paralyzes while hope invigorates. Collective experiences and memories inculcate levels of fear across communities and insulate against change. Fear can overwhelm hope when the prospect for a better future is associated with negative experiences of the past. Exposure to those who have survived and overcome insulates against fear and liberates individuals and communities to seek positive change. Those who perished in the Holocaust gave courage to the ones who survived. The survivors give courage to those who are still in the struggle ... and hope.

Building Hope

Researchers have explored several mechanisms that help increase hope. Kaye Herth, PhD, registered nurse (RN) and assistant professor at Northern Illinois University’s School of

¹¹² Halperin et al., “Emotions in Conflict,” 252.

¹¹³ Ibid., 253–54.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Nursing, lists “seven ‘hope fostering’ characteristics: interpersonal connectedness, attainable goals, spiritual base, personal attributes, lightheartedness, uplifting memories, and affirmation of worth.”¹¹⁶ Later studies identify other hope-enhancing strategies, including “finding meaning, affirming relationships, and “living in the present.”¹¹⁷ Jack Coulehan’s research at Stony Brook University’s Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics also finds it helpful to foster good relationships with those trying to help, avoid detached concern, and practice empathy and compassion.¹¹⁸

Dignity therapy emerges as a helpful hope-building strategy.¹¹⁹ It has two primary principles: to promote a sense of human worth and to involve family members and loved ones in the attainment of personal goals.¹²⁰ It seeks to encourage communication with family and staff and to promote respect for individuals and their innate privacy, rights, independence, and authority.¹²¹ It encourages them to talk about their feelings, desires, and what is important to them.¹²² Strategies include encouraging individuals to think and make decisions about the future and reminding them of happier days and previous successes.¹²³ These strategies help bolster self-esteem by increasing confidence in their abilities.¹²⁴ Dignity Therapy tries to foster a sense of

¹¹⁶ Jack Coulehan, “Suffering, Hope, and Healing,” in *Handbook of Pain and Palliative Care: Biopsychosocial and Environmental Approaches for the Life Course*, ed. Rhonda J. Moore (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 739–53, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95369-4_35, 746–47.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 747–48,

¹¹⁹ Rahimi et al., “Dignity Therapy Improves Hope and Quality of Life in Cancer Patients,” 161.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹²¹ Ibid., 157.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

meaning and purpose in life.¹²⁵ Other simple but overlooked methods are to remember and call individuals by name, to pay attention to people, and to give attention to their wishes, requests, and desires.¹²⁶

Edward C. Chang at Northern Kentucky University used Adult Hope Scale along with problem-solving and coping strategy inventories to examine whether high-hope and low-hope individuals employed different problem-solving and coping strategies.¹²⁷ He finds that high-hope individuals are more positively oriented and rational in their approach to problem solving. Conversely low-hope individuals tended to be more negatively oriented and avoidant in their problem-solving strategies.¹²⁸ His research implies that in certain environments nurturing hope may benefit from a greater focus on hope agency than hope pathways.¹²⁹ Encouraging individuals to perceive the willing intervention of a capable entity (agent) and encouraging them to remain engaged in solving problems may increase the efficacy of hope-building strategies.

Restoring Hope

The loss of hope is directly associated with suffering and a loss of personal dignity. Much suffering results from an attack on “integrity of, or sense of self, dissociation or otherness,” and “the draining of events upon one’s sense of worth or value.”¹³⁰ Researchers Hirono and Blake, studying the role of religious leaders in restoring hope following natural disasters, affirm that “in PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), the acceptance of a spiritual power may lead to a spiritual

¹²⁵ Rahimi et al., “Dignity Therapy Improves Hope and Quality of Life in Cancer Patients,” 162.

¹²⁶ Ibid.,” 161.

¹²⁷ Edward C. Chang, “Hope, Problem-Solving Ability, and Coping in a College Student Population: Some Implications for Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* vol. 54, no. 7, 955–56.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 959.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 960.

¹³⁰ Coulehan, “Suffering, Hope, and Healing,” 739.

awakening which, in turn, can assuage survivor guilt.”¹³¹ They echo earlier findings that a spiritual approach is essential to restore hope and build “a more balanced view about justice and injustice, safety and danger, and good and evil.”¹³² Herth finds this spiritual base is an important “hope-enhancing” feature while working with geriatric patients.¹³³ For Christians, these “religious correlations” undergird hope and optimism.¹³⁴

Building and restoring Christian hope is more than restoring optimism and personal dignity. It points individuals to Jesus Christ and helps them associate positive expectancy with divine agency. It is helping them place their confidence in the beneficent will of the Father, the finished and future work of Jesus, and the present intervention of the Holy Spirit. Building and restoring Christian hope also involves shifting the focus from a mere optimistic expectancy to associating that expectancy with agency and pathways, both human (through Christ) and divine (in Christ).

Christian Ministry Is More Than Social Work

Hope Station needs a clear vision of the purpose of Christian ministry and to understand its place in the continuum of social work. Christian ministry raises awareness of God’s reign on the earth¹³⁵ and His active involvement (divine agency) in the affairs of men. Christian relief efforts provide temporal solutions through human agency that offer temporal hope and build a foundation for eternal hope in divine agency. Christians are called to do good works, not just

¹³¹ Hirono and Blake, “The Role of Religious Leaders,” 5.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Coulehan, “Suffering, Hope, and Healing,” 747.

¹³⁴ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

within the church (Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14), but in the world (1 Tim 5:10; Titus 3:8, 14) and even toward their enemies (Matt 5:43–48).

It has been said that “all struggle against injustice and brutality is interpreted as a theological event, which is ‘provoked and energized by the Holy Spirit.’”¹³⁶ One interpretation of Hebrews 13:11–13 is as a challenge to suffer as Jesus did among outsiders.¹³⁷ In *Stories from the Street*, David Nixon, theologian, educator, and Anglican priest, describes a “particularly striking image” in which “theologians are called to go outside the camp and join the poor, to become one of the homeless, who alone are able to set them free from their own oppressive instincts.”¹³⁸ In interviews with homeless persons, Nixon relates that “For the majority of those interviewed, there is little comprehension that the Christian story is Good News for them.”¹³⁹ Christian ministry demonstrates to the world the eternal hopes of believers through their benevolent work in this present world. It does not replace or supplant divine agency but instead brings glory to God through the things He accomplishes through believers (John 15:5–8).

There is a continuum of benevolent Christian service and a spectrum of opinions on how it should be accomplished. Many churches are actively engaged in their communities, providing safe environments, productive activities, case management, housing, “food and nutrition, vocational development, employment, clothing, and other supplies and health services.”¹⁴⁰ Some even believe the church’s ministry should seek to end the causes of homelessness, rather than

¹³⁶ David Nixon, *Stories from the Street: A Theology of Homelessness* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 12, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 14.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 148.

¹⁴⁰ David P. Moxley, Olivia G. M. Washington, and Joe McElhaney, “‘I Don’t Have a Home:’ Helping Homeless People Through Faith, Spirituality, and Compassionate Service,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 2 (June 2012): 431–49, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s10943-010-9363-6>, 433.

just treating it.¹⁴¹ Others, however, seem to prefer that this work take place outside the church. One Bible college student, following a “poverty immersion experience,” relates how he came from a “very like conservative, traditional, suburban church and ... I think that we would not have liked it if they would have come in [the church building/for church], because we were real clean and stuff, and we would not have known how to handle them ... or even like relate to them.”¹⁴²

David P. Moxley, professor and director of the University of Alaska’s School of Social Work, with over forty-five years of experience in social work and education, writes, “The church does not have to take on the complete responsibility for the continuum but can serve a pivotal role in catalyzing action and in creating components that incorporate the strengths of the congregation.”¹⁴³ He sees church engagement in homeless ministry as expressing “a deep faith in the ability of people to transform, garner grace, and move toward spiritual fulfillment.”¹⁴⁴

There is a disparate approach of Protestant churches to publicly oriented social concerns versus private emphasis on evangelism that has been called a “two-party system.”¹⁴⁵ The “other-worldly” approach sees a need to distinguish the evangelistic roles of the church from secular affairs to keep the focus on salvation and the world to come. The “this-worldly” approach sees a contemporary environment for religiously motivated civic action. These suggest that faith is necessary to the meaningful engagement of social concerns and find that the church provides the

¹⁴¹ Michael W. Firmin, “How College Students View the Church’s Responsibility for the Homeless 1.5 Years after a College Poverty Immersion Experience,” *Social Work and Christianity* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 68–84, 3.

¹⁴² Firmin et al, “How College Students View the Church’s Responsibility,” 11.

¹⁴³ Moxley, “I Don’t Have a Home,” 442.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 433

¹⁴⁵ Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, “Defining Mission Orientations: The Relationship between Social Action and Evangelism,” *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry*, (New York, 2005: online edition, Oxford Academic, 1 Oct 2005), 7.

missing link in mental health, rehabilitative, and support services.¹⁴⁶ This researcher would argue that the duty of Christian believers is not to escape this present world while merely agreeing with the precepts of the Bible but to put them on full display and live them out in overcoming the influence and effects of sin. Inspiring hope is the “underlying premise”¹⁴⁷ in counseling and is an essential function of the church¹⁴⁸ and the clergy¹⁴⁹ and is an essential element in recovery.¹⁵⁰ Velmarie Albertini, who has served as a professor in social sciences and social work and also as a department chairperson and associate professor in ministry, says it is necessary to find “a proper balance between meeting social and psychological needs without losing sight of the primary role of communicating the gospel.”¹⁵¹

Causality of Homelessness

Hope Station seeks to inspire hope by fostering an openness to God among those facing homelessness and addiction. These stressors can overwhelm psychological defenses and lead to a loss of hope.¹⁵² These individuals can experience further isolation caused by labeling and stereotyping that deters them from seeking help.¹⁵³ This isolation is deepened by a growing

¹⁴⁶ Hirono and Blake, “The Role of Religious Leaders, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Velmarie L. Albertini and Jonathan Grenz, *Synergistic Collaborations: Pastoral Care and Church Social Work* (Lanham, MD: UPA, 2010), 19.

¹⁵² John N. Constantino and W. Thomas Baumel, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: Reconciling Faith and Science in Crises of Hope,” *Zygon* 56, no. 4 (November 20, 2021): 820–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12741>, 824.

¹⁵³ Amanda Ervin and Lyn Litchke, “Stigma Perspectives from Adults Experiencing Substance Use, Mental Health and Homelessness Issues,” *Journal of Addiction & Addictive Disorders* 8, no. 2 (December 24, 2021): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.24966/aad-7276/100068>, 1.

ambivalence to matters of faith that contributes to hopelessness.¹⁵⁴ Constantino directly ties conflicts between faith and science to the lack of investment in spirituality among the current generation of adolescents and young adults.¹⁵⁵ He believes it is the “most salient” issue “to the resolution or prevention of clinical crisis of hope among youth and young adults.”¹⁵⁶ Openness to God and a corporate expression of that connection with others is critical to avoiding and recovering from hopelessness, homelessness, and addiction.¹⁵⁷ In the clinical treatment of addictions, it is often a prerequisite to recovery.¹⁵⁸ To help these individuals, believers must welcome them into fellowship and seek to foster their openness to God. They must also avoid stigmas and stereotypes that alienate and isolate others.

Being aware of the underlying causes of homelessness will help in better understanding the hopelessness that homelessness produces. Many individuals and churches struggle to understand homelessness, lack insight into the causes of homelessness, fail to see divine purpose in homelessness, and or embrace false or generalized assumptions about homeless persons.¹⁵⁹ Homelessness is often negatively associated with chronic substance abuse and mental illness. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, only about one-third (thirty-six percent in 2019) of chronically homeless persons suffer from chronic substance abuse

¹⁵⁴ Constantino and Baumel, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: Reconciling Faith and Science in Crises of Hope,” 825.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Brian J. Grim and Melissa E. Grim, “Belief, Behavior, and Belonging: How Faith Is Indispensable in Preventing and Recovering from Substance Abuse,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 5 (July 29, 2019): 1713–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-019-00876-w>, 1714.

¹⁵⁸ Constantino and Baumel, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: Reconciling Faith and Science in Crises of Hope,” 828.

¹⁵⁹ Moxley, “I Don’t Have a Home,” 437

or mental health disorders.¹⁶⁰ Substance abuse and addiction do often contribute to homelessness,¹⁶¹ but a common misunderstanding is that drug addiction increases with homelessness.¹⁶² Researchers find just the opposite, that seventy percent of homeless persons struggling with addiction report using the same amount or less of harmful substances while homeless.¹⁶³ This is partly due to less access to harmful substances and partly due to their efforts at recovery.¹⁶⁴

To inspire hope, Christians must avoid projecting false assumptions on those suffering through both homelessness and addiction. One study finds that after experiencing “poverty immersion” college students generally find homelessness to be circumstantial rather than due to poor life choices.¹⁶⁵ Many systemic factors contribute to homelessness.¹⁶⁶ Two main causes seem to be a rise in poverty and a decline in the availability of affordable housing.¹⁶⁷ Nixon relates that “homelessness is often the result of serious loss or losses—of close relative, of job, of partner, of health.”¹⁶⁸

Nixon believes that churches are reluctant to ask deeper questions about the phenomenon of homelessness. He also shows that homeless people lose their roles in the communal stories

¹⁶⁰ Amanda Lautieri, ed., “Addiction among the Homeless Population | Sunrise House,” *Addiction Among the Homeless Population* February 9, 2021, <https://sunrisehouse.com/addiction-demographics/homeless-population/>.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Joan Archart-Treichel, “Homelessness Does Not Lead to Increased Substance Abuse,” *Psychiatric News* June 18, 2004, <https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/pn.39.12.0390009>.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Firmin et al, “How College Students View the Church’s Responsibility,” 80.

¹⁶⁶ Moxley, “I Don’t Have a Home,” 437.

¹⁶⁷ Amy Melissa Donley, “The Perception of Homeless People: Important Factors in Determining Perceptions of the Homeless as Dangerous” (PhD dis., University of Central Florida, ProQuest Dissertations).

¹⁶⁸ Nixon, *Stories from the Street*, 147.

taking place around them.¹⁶⁹ He suggests a “theology of homelessness” that understands God not only as “God of the homeless, but a homeless God, who shares stories and provides hope.”¹⁷⁰

Gaps in the Literature

This review uncovered little discussion in recent scholarly literature on divine agency and pathways in hope.¹⁷¹ This is an expected gap in secular literature, which typically seeks to understand the world apart from the divine.¹⁷² As Christian beliefs are assimilated and marginalized within secular ideologies, spiritual elements in hope are presented as abstract beliefs,¹⁷³ behavioral modalities,¹⁷⁴ inspiring superstitions,¹⁷⁵ spiritual disciplines,¹⁷⁶ useful interventions,¹⁷⁷ or illusory extensions of human experience. There is no mention of or place for direct divine intervention.¹⁷⁸

The absence of discussion of divine agency and pathways in Christian hope presents an unexpected and glaring oversight in Christian literature. This may extend from a lack of agreement or acceptance of secular definitions of hope. It may also represent a lack of attention

¹⁶⁹ Nixon, *Stories from the Street*, 147.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁷¹ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 5.

¹⁷² Ricko Damberg Nissen, Frederik Gildberg, and Niels Hvidt, “Psychiatry, a Secular Discipline in a Postsecular World? A Review,” *Religions* 9, no. 1 (2018): 32, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9010032>.

¹⁷³ Daniela Villani, “The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Subjective Well-Being of Individuals with Different Religious Status,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10 (July 9, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525>.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Alfreon Faiza, “Social and Psychological Factors for Superstition: A Brief Literature Review,” *International Journal of Advance Study and Research Work* 1, no. 5 (August 2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1405381>.

¹⁷⁶ Villani, “The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity,” 5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ Michel Loreau, *Nature that Makes us Human: Why We Keep Destroying Nature and How We Can Stop Doing So*, Oxford Academic, 23 Mar 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1092/oso/9780197628430.003.0005>, accessed 2 July 2024.

being given to agency and pathways as specific elements of Christian hope that differentiate it from pious optimism. Christian hope is widely understood by believers as a product of Jesus Christ's achievement in accomplishing the plan of salvation and providing a way to eternal life. It is generally understood as an eternal hope that conveys temporal hopes.

Christians understand divine agency and pathways as divine volition and action in eternal Christian themes of atonement, redemption, and resurrection. They acknowledge these elements in temporal Christian themes of provision, healing, deliverance, etc. Though Christian hope is firmly anchored in these, divine agency and pathways do not emerge as fundamental and differentiating elements of Christian hope in scholarly Christian literature.

This DMIN action research project will seek to build an understanding of Christian hope within the context of divine agency and pathways. It will help Hope Station workers and patrons see their participation (human agency) within Christian hope as a product of divine agency in partnership with divine will.¹⁷⁹ It will continue as a matter of thoroughness to seek to find in Christian literature this missing theme of divine agency in Christian hope.

Conclusion

This literature review reveals that there is little agreement on what constitutes hope in contemporary scholarly literature, whether secular or Christian. Secular literature focuses on temporal hopes while Christian literature tends to focus on the eternal. Secular literature depends heavily on Snyder's definition of hope as a positive expectancy built upon agency (definite or undetermined) and pathways (viable or not). Snyder's definition is distinguished by its ability to differentiate hope from mere optimism. While Christian literature establishes hope in the definite

¹⁷⁹ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, "Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty," 5.

agency (person and work) of Jesus Christ and the pathway of eternal life, it does not specifically embrace Snyder's concepts of agency and pathways. Focusing upon divine agency, divine pathways, and the value of suffering will empower believers to better understand Christian hope within and for their present circumstances in the world.

Theological Foundations

The theological basis for this action research project is that hope is available to all people through the good news that God desires peace (Luke 2:14) with all men (2 Pet 3:9) and that the mystery of God's eternal purpose is to draw everything in heaven and in earth together into one in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:9–10). God has a plan, and His plan is from and for all eternity.¹⁸⁰ It is based upon His own will and good pleasure¹⁸¹ that Jesus says is to give the kingdom to His flock (Luke 12:32).

Divine Agency in Hope

Divine agency is central to the discussion of hope, especially for the Christian. It is too simple to view life through the lens of one's own experiences¹⁸² and efforts and the success of life as a culmination of one's own decisions or achievements. Whether innate, evil, or divinely inspired, the motives and efforts of self or others that lead to inexorable outcomes are typically perceived as the primary causes of their past, present, or future state. Christian hope, though, rests upon divine agency—historical, present, and future. Paul is clear that salvation is a gift, not a wage (Eph 2:8–10). That is true not only in eternity but in the present state. Believers in Jesus

¹⁸⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 323.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Steven C. van den Heuvel, ed., *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 92, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-46489-9>.

Christ are not only saved in the sense of a past historical event or the sense of a settled future state. Both are true. But Believers are also being presently saved and, in this view, salvation is a divine and ongoing event in the life of the believer that is achieved by divine volition and action (Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 1 Thess 5:9–10; Phil 1:6). It is the product of divine, not human agency (John 1:13).

God's Plan Gives Hope

God's plan is not just for a select few but offers hope to whosoever believes (John 3:16). It is His choice that all men (1 Pet 3:9) live forever before Him in a holy state¹⁸³ free of blame and within love (Eph 1:4). This leads to two inevitable conclusions. Everyone has a place in God's eternal purpose, and therefore, everyone has a hope of a better state of existence within that purpose. God is active in this present world toward all men (2 Pet 3:9) in achieving this.

God's Volition Gives Hope

God's will to act individually is evident in that it is His good pleasure to predestine anyone who believes unto adoption as children of God and within the fellowship of the saints (1 John 1:3–4) to be accepted and loved (Eph 1:6). To that end and because of His great love for the world, God sent Jesus Christ to accomplish salvation for all men (John 3:16) and to reconcile all men to Himself (2 Cor 5:19). God also equips and appoints believers as ministers of reconciliation in this present world (2 Cor 5:19) to build up the church in love (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11–16), not as lords over His heritage (1 Pet 5:3) but to feed His sheep (John 21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2) and fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:15).

¹⁸³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 323.

Faith Gives Hope

Hope is anchored in belief. To believe is to have lasting hope. To be unbelieving and without faith is to be without hope (Mark 16:16). Access to God's grace and participation in this eternal state is by faith alone (Eph 2:8–9). Eternal life is available to everyone who believes through the undeserved, unmerited favor of God (John 3:16, Mark 16:16; Rom 1:16). God extends His grace even to the unbelieving in making His eternal power and Godhead apparent in all of creation (Rom 1:20), by giving every man a measure of faith through which to believe (Rom 12:3), and by sending His testimony (Ps 19:1–4) and His messengers (Jer 26:5; 35:15) throughout all the earth. He multiplied the expression of His love and grace by sending His Son to bear witness to this truth (John 3:16; 18:37), to reveal and satisfy the demands of the law (1 John 2:2–6), and to break the delusion (John 8:31–36) and bondage of sin (Gal 5:1). God also elevated hope for all men by sending Jesus to overcome the fear of death by destroying Satan and the power of death (Heb 2:14–15), and to purchase salvation for all people (Titus 2:11) with His own blood (Heb 9:12).

God's Longsuffering Gives Hope

God is longsuffering and patient in the fulfillment of His eternal purpose and desires that all men have eternal hope (2 Pet 3:9). He demonstrated his longsuffering by delaying the deluge of his judgment over the whole earth while waiting for Noah to prepare an ark that would save only eight souls (1 Pet 3:20).¹⁸⁴ Jesus said that the last days would be like the days of Noah (Matt 24:37). Peter asserts in his second epistle that the second coming of Jesus and the future judgment are also delayed because of the longsuffering of God.¹⁸⁵ God is unwilling that any

¹⁸⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 266.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 266–67.

should perish and is giving opportunity for repentance (2 Pet 3:9). In the Revelation Jesus also echoes the idea that God is withholding judgment until the number of faithful martyrs is complete (Rev 6:9–11).

Temporal versus Eternal Hope

Hope in this present world is a derivative of eternal hope. Substitutes for eternal hope include temporal and passing hopes like those found in the blissful ignorance of the fool (Ps 14:1), the intoxication that hides from the truth (Prov 6:5; 20:5; 23:29–35), and the prideful heart of the wicked that avoids any knowledge of impending judgment (Ps 10:4; 14:2–4). Yet, temporal hopes will fail. For those without eternal hope, the future holds only the emptiness of death (Job 20:4–9; Eccl 9:5–6; Isa 38:10–15, 18) and the miserable knowledge (or ignorance) of impending death and eternal judgment (1 Cor 15:19; Heb 10:27).

Theologian Ronald T. Michener discusses Christian hope as a theological hope that he defines as “a hope in God making all things right in the promise of resurrection and new creation because of Christ.” He discusses temporal hopes of Christian agency bringing about good in the present world.¹⁸⁶ He discusses hope’s motivating power upon human agency.¹⁸⁷ Agency, always presented as human, though in partnership with the divine, in the temporal sense is that which enables an earthly expression of the kingdom of God, leads to knowing God, and anticipates the eschaton.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Van den Heuvel, *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, 91.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

The Bible does offer temporal, personal, and earthly hope.¹⁸⁹ The Scriptures contain many examples of temporal objects of hope. Dr. Peter H. Monsma of Grove City College identified several, including finding water (Job 6:15–20), getting paid (Luke 6:34), visiting someone (Rom 15:24, 2 John 12, etc.), being saved from a storm (Acts 23:20), having children (Ruth 1:12), seeing a miracle (Luke 23:8), even of military victory (Ps 33:18).¹⁹⁰ Many of these hopes were realized amid suffering and are typical of many of the needs expressed today by those searching for hope. These temporal hopes, though biblical, cannot be the primary expectation of believers but must be anchored in an anticipation of broader and more lasting hopes stemming from God’s completed work through Jesus Christ.

Believers must not directly seek the temporal benefits of the gospel.¹⁹¹ They must look instead to the eternal (Mark 8:31–37). Even in the Old Testament, hopes were not merely materialistic but extended to the eternal.¹⁹² Eve was promised that her Seed would subjugate the serpent that beguiled her (Gen 3:15). Mourning the death of his children, Job believed he would see his Redeemer even after his body had perished (Job 19:26). Daniel also anticipated the resurrection of the dead, some to eternal life, others to shame and contempt (Dan 12:2).

Lasting Benefits of Hope

The true spiritual benefits of hope emerge only when temporal ambition, self-will, and pride are abandoned.¹⁹³ Many eternal and immaterial benefits of hope can be gained in this

¹⁸⁹ Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 199.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 985.

¹⁹² Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 577.

¹⁹³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 985.

present life. Hope stabilizes the soul in the steadfastness of God.¹⁹⁴ It produces “joyful confidence in God (Rom 8:28), unashamed patience in tribulation (Rom 5:3), and perseverance in prayer.”¹⁹⁵ Hope anticipates resurrection and eternal life. Speaking of the hope of resurrection of the dead, Paul refers to the hope of believers in this present world but adds that temporal hope alone would cause even believers to be of all men most miserable (1 Cor 15:19).

Hope Is for Everyone

The good news of evangelism is that there is hope for all men through peace with God. Angels announcing the birth of Jesus proclaimed the beneficent will of God to establish this peace with men, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14 KJV). Jesus said it is for whosoever believes (John 3:16) and reminded his apostles of this peace at the Last Supper the night before his crucifixion (John 14:27). Peter also asserts that God is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance (2 Pet 2:9). All are invited to come to God, to rely upon His promises, to do well, be sincere, and watch for His faithful response (Isa 1:16–20; Mal 3:10; Rev 3:20).

Hope Is Found in Jesus

Christ himself is regarded as the hope of believers.¹⁹⁶ He announced peace with God through Himself even amid tribulation in this world (John 16:33). This peace comes with belief and repentance,¹⁹⁷ both of which are gifts from God, through acknowledging the truth. The truth itself is a gift from God, without which men will find themselves enslaved and deluded (John

¹⁹⁴ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 577.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 985.

8:23–26; 2 Thess 2:7–12). After the Resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the truth throughout all the world (Mark 16:15). This truth must be preached with clarity not only proclaiming the hope that is found in Jesus but also warning men of sin and judgment (Ezek 3:17–19; 1 Cor 14:8).

Other Purposes for Hope

Two other theological bases for proclaiming the good news of hope in Jesus are that Jesus, the Son of Man, will find faith on the earth when he returns (Luke 18:8) and that the earth may be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). Though these refer to the Second Coming and the millennial reign of Christ,¹⁹⁸ hope is to resound over all the earth and be embraced by all men. Jesus is to be anticipated and welcomed when He returns to Earth. The hope of the gospel is to cross every barrier and endure through all times¹⁹⁹ until the return of Christ and even unto the end (Heb 6:11).

The hope of the gospel through the church not only helps men get free from sin but provides believers a place to walk (Zech 3:7). That place to walk is in two worlds, one temporal and one eternal. Paul writes that the believer's conversation is in heaven (Phil 3:20–21) and the witness of the church is before both men and angels (Eph 2:6,19; 3:10). Jesus said that merely giving a cup of cold water in His name (Matt 10:42) is a beneficial act conferring eternal rewards (Mark 9:41). Yet, outreach ministry carries that witness into the “highways and hedges” (Luke 14:23 KJV), “without the gate” (Heb 13:12, KJV), to those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, or in

¹⁹⁸ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary. An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1056.

¹⁹⁹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 985.

prison (Matt 25:36–44), inviting them to move beyond mere temporal expectations and venture into the eternal hopes that stem from fellowship with Jesus.

Suffering and Hope

Suffering must be seen as having value and affording hope for the believer and the unbeliever alike. In this present world, suffering is a primary motivator that stirs men to move from death to life. For the believer, distress, oppression, and affliction build patience, experience, and hope (Rom 5:3–5). It brings the opportunity to participate in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). It offers the joy of being counted worthy to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41). For the unbelieving suffering creates an opportunity to consider the course of their lives (e.g., the prodigal son), (Luke 15:14–19). Suffering drives men to seek the gifts of repentance (2 Tim 2:25–26) and hope (Ps 62:5), both gifts from God.

Conclusion

God acts Himself to convey hope to all mankind throughout all time and has set forth the mission to convey this hope as a primary function of the believers and the church. The apostle Paul called God the God of Hope (Rom 15:13). David writes that the expectation of hope is from God (Ps 62:5) and that God's Word is a source of hope (Ps 119:114). Hope is not just for the by and by but also relies upon God's present work (Ps 46). Therefore, the tangible service and ministry of the church must be accompanied by a current, undeterred, and resounding message of both temporal and eternal hope in Jesus Christ.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations of this action research project are built upon an understanding that individuals can actively participate in the mystery of God's eternal purpose to draw

everything in heaven and earth into one in Jesus Christ. This action research project will seek through interviews and group discussion in a real-world ministry environment to strengthen a biblical concept of hope within workers and patrons alike and to encourage them to participate actively in defining issues, exploring solutions, and better understanding their role in the ministry²⁰⁰ at Hope Station. Though their participation amounts to human agency, this project will seek to help workers understand and explore their partnership with divine agency, to develop a better understanding of true Christian hope themselves, and to inspire that hope in others.

Human Agency in Hope

Researchers from the University of Notre Dame and the University of California studied the relationship between hope and human dignity in helping women find their way out of poverty. They based their investigation on a partnership with a microfinance lender who provided a tangible means of intervention. This formed a definite agency and pathway for hope within their study. Though it was built upon biblical principles and relied upon Christian motivation,²⁰¹ it built a reliance upon a human agency and pathway for intervention.²⁰² The researchers associate hope with human agency guided by the will and grace of God.²⁰³ They identify the sovereign will of God summoned to act within human agency as a vital component of hope. They note key differences between historical Protestant and Catholic approaches to human agency, with Protestants emphasizing direct human intervention and Catholics relying

²⁰⁰ Earnest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 39.

²⁰¹ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, "Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty," 4.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5.

more passively on God's sovereignty.²⁰⁴ They find that their trial method of emphasizing divinely guided human agency brought greater improvement of hopefulness among Catholics than Protestants.²⁰⁵ They tended to attribute the increase in hope to their religious messages, more so in those for whom the messages were new.²⁰⁶ They felt that Protestant women were more generally familiar with these messages and benefitted less than Catholic women.²⁰⁷ Another possible conclusion that might be reasonably supportable by their research findings is that Protestant women who had already developed a greater reliance upon human agency were generally less inspired toward changes in their hope levels when offered solutions based upon human agency and pathways.

Other researchers explored the hope-mediating ministry of religious leaders to the victims and survivors of natural disasters.²⁰⁸ Their theoretical framework cites studies that base hope upon human agency.²⁰⁹ This agency is either direct acts toward others or internal acts of piety such as prayer and other religious rituals.²¹⁰ Throughout their research human agency is the causal effect driving hope.²¹¹ Ministers of various religions instill hope by promoting religious belief and by alleviating spiritual concerns of shame and guilt in the causality of natural disasters.²¹² Hirono and Blake find religious belief and spiritual exercises to be therapeutic in

²⁰⁴ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, "Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty," 6.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Hirono and Blake, "The Role of Religious Leaders," 1.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 3–6.

promoting well-being and mental health and reducing PTSD.²¹³ Spirituality and religious belief are treated as synonymous and are promoted through reflective and ritual practices rather than building confidence in the agency, pathways, or even the person of God.²¹⁴

Pastor Rebecca Strong's church began a ministry for the homeless that looks to reduce the intractable vulnerability that leads to and stems from homelessness.²¹⁵ Her initiative pools resources and social capital from the congregation and builds community partnerships to provide immediate crisis assistance and help individuals obtain stable housing and employment.²¹⁶ In his article about Pastor Rebecca's church, Dr. Moxley asserts that the helpers themselves find grace and redemption as their giving helps them escape materialism.²¹⁷ Moxley finds that prayer also helps enable people to articulate their struggles better and fosters a wider understanding of the obstacles and marginalization they face.²¹⁸ These interventions and even the influence of prayer on their gracious transformation out of sin²¹⁹ are couched within human works and the personal agency of both the giver and the recipient.

The Need for Hope

Hope is critical. Drs. Tom and Bev Rodgers, both authors and counselors with PhDs in clinical Christian counseling, assert that people seek counseling because they do not have

²¹³ Hirono and Blake, "The Role of Religious Leaders," 5–6.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹⁵ Moxley, "I Don't Have a Home," 437.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 433.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 445.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 441.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

hope.²²⁰ They say that hope builds resilience, which “helps people bounce back from adversity and deal with wounds from their past.”²²¹ Many of the people seeking help from Hope Station are in adversity, struggling with addictions, dealing with past wounds, and have lost hope.

The intractability of homelessness leaves people feeling hopeless and trapped. It is often compounded by addiction and developmental or mental disabilities. Their ancillary support resources are spent, and they often feel they have no one to call upon for help. Once they cross the bridge into homelessness, addiction, or mental impairment, they find themselves objectified and at the end of a long line of vagabonds and castaways reaching for limited handouts.

Helplessness versus Hopelessness

Repeated experiences of failure and feelings of helplessness can turn into a long-term Learned Helplessness (LH).²²² Expecting to be unable to change their circumstances or experience success can cause a person to quit. They can develop a belief system that nothing they do matters. This can cause them to fail to recognize or act upon opportunities within their capability to effect a positive change. Hopelessness looks a lot like depression but may be differentiated in that depression typically relates to past events and trauma. In contrast, hopelessness relates to a negative expectation concerning the future and the ability to change it.²²³

²²⁰ Timothy E. Clinton and Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 154.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

²²² Sivakumar Nuvvula, “Learned Helplessness,” *Contemporary Clinical Dentistry* (Mumbai: Medknow Publications & Media Pvt Ltd, 2016), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5141652/>.

²²³ Susan L. Dunn, “Hopelessness as a Response to Physical Illness,” *Journal of Nursing Scholarship: An Official Publication of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing* 37, no. 2 (2005), 150.

Helplessness and hopelessness have both been associated with physical, mental, and behavioral ailments.²²⁴ They also contribute to spiritual conditions such as doubt, discouragement, and fear. Hopelessness has even been identified as a predictor of hypertension, coronary heart disease, myocardial infarction, and cancer.²²⁵

Hope and Personal Control

Shanahan, Fischer, and Rand equate agency in hope with perceived personal control over outcomes.²²⁶ They find the level of individual control to be the differentiator between hope and optimism, with hope corresponding to greater personal control and optimism to less control.²²⁷ Sense of hope was measured using the Adult Hope Scale.²²⁸ They find hope to be associated with internal beliefs concerning self and optimism related to views of external factors about the world.²²⁹ They also find that hope-based achievement of hoped-for goals is directly related to personal control.²³⁰

Human Versus Divine Agency in Hope

The researchers and authors discussed above represent a chorus of testimony that identifies human agency as a driving force of hope for change. This human agency acting within divine agency can be manifested in two ways. The ones exercising hope could develop a sense of their own need to participate in improving their state of well-being and exercise their own human

²²⁴ Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 198.

²²⁵ Dunn, "Hopelessness as a Response to Physical Illness," 149.

²²⁶ Shanahan, "Hope, Optimism, and Affect," 5.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 7.

agency, even if divinely inspired and enabled to do so. Other human agents could also intervene, perhaps even divinely enabled or inspired to do so.

This action research project recognizes the importance of human agency in hope but also proposes that biblical Christian hope rests more upon divine rather than human agency. God has His own divine will and ability to either act supernaturally or through human agents. A Biblical concept of hope acknowledges the value of suffering and the preeminence of the eternal over the temporal. Jesus directs men to set their affections upon the eternal.²³¹ He warns against seeking to save one's own life or merely seeking one's own temporal benefit (Matt 16:24–26). God often moves human agents to bring temporal intervention, but He also steps into the story and acts Himself.

Hope in Suffering

Hope is crucial in this present world, anticipating what cannot yet be seen. It is crucial because believers and unbelievers alike experience persecution, tribulation, and suffering in this world. Yet, it is suffering that ultimately produces hope (Rom 5:3–5). Three primary purposes of suffering are to test faith, build experience, and cultivate hope!

Christian hope comes from God (Ps 62:5) and is spiritual, not circumstantial. Paul and Silas sang praises while chained to a prison floor (Acts 16:24–25), and the first-century church rejoiced at the plundering of their goods, knowing they had a better and more enduring possession (Heb 10:34). That possession is eternal from God and cannot be taken away from them. Their godly achievements in this world are not in vain but rather their righteous acts in this

²³¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 985.

world are vested in God's new world to come.²³² Their present and future eternal fellowship with God provides them with hope.

Suffering and hope go hand in hand.²³³ Those who are suffering often have difficulty seeing God as good.²³⁴ Ironically, as they struggle with helplessness and hopelessness, they are in the very crucible in which hope is formed. Hope Station workers encounter people within this crucible and are especially suited in time, place, and circumstances to inspire hope. They can cultivate hope by building an understanding that God's will is good and that a better outcome for them is possible,²³⁵ and for a believer, is inevitable (Jer 29:11–14a, Rom 8:28). They can help build a healthy perspective of God and suffering—that God is present in suffering and that suffering produces hope.

Integrating Sacred and Secular Hope Models

Sandra Hoover-Kinsinger was a former assistant professor of Education at Augustana University and a former professor of psychology at the University of South Dakota.²³⁶ Her graduate work focused on the psychology of hope; she worked extensively with at-risk students and families and researched hopefulness and faith development.²³⁷ She suggests integrating

²³² Glen Nielsen, "Things We Do Not Fully Preach About Preparing to Die," *Concordia Journal* vol. 40 no. 1 (2014), 28.

²³³ Clinton and Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, 155.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

²³⁶ "Augustana Welcomes New Faculty Members to Campus," Augustana University, August 13, 2016, <https://www.augie.edu/news/augustana-welcomes-new-faculty-members-campus>.

²³⁷ Batesville Inc., "Obituary for Sandra Ellen Hoover-Kinsinger at Miller Funeral Home - Southside," Obituary | Sandra Ellen Hoover-Kinsinger of Sioux Falls, South Dakota | Miller Funeral Home (Miller Funeral Home - Southside, August 22, 2019), <https://www.millerfh.com/obituary/sandra-kinsinger>.

Snyder's temporal psychology of hope with Jurgen Moltmann's eternal theology of hope.²³⁸ She explains that Snyder inextricably links hope to belief in and action toward attaining goals.²³⁹ Snyder observes that the hopeful one has a perceived discrepancy in their present and desired state.²⁴⁰ This accords with Moltmann's observation of the disparity between the present sinful condition and the future glorious state that spurs the present action of hopeful Christians.²⁴¹ Moltmann emphasizes a Christian eschatological focus on cosmic reconciliation and justice in partnership with divine agency. Snyder describes an existential human focus on coping in the present.²⁴² The disparity between present and future is a disparity between death and life for the Christian.²⁴³ Kinsinger shows that this integration of the temporal psychology of hope and the eternal theology of hope can form a practical synthesis of sacred and secular concepts of hope. It can create a premise for partnership between psychology and theology that recognizes the importance of reliance upon divine agency in the near term. This premise can also instruct and guide human agency and help reveal the significance of the role of human agency within divine agency for the long-term (Phil 4:13).

²³⁸ Sandra E. Hoover-Kinsinger, "Hoping Against Hope: An Integration of the Hope Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and C. R. Snyder's Psychology of HopeSan," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 37, no. 4 (2018): 313–22.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 316–17.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 317.

Why Action Research?

What Makes Action Research Different as a Methodology?

This project utilizes a process referred to as action research. This stands apart from theoretical research that is based primarily on literature reviews and academic research in that it takes place in a real-world ministry environment and examines the real-life experiences of people. Ernest Stringer notes two significant ways it differs from “traditional hypothesis-testing research.”²⁴⁴ Objectivity is not the primary aim, as participants are knowingly engaged in understanding the problem and developing solutions that make sense to them. Researchers do not approach the problem to prove or disprove a hypothesis but rather to understand the problem better and explore solutions. Research practices are also subject to the review and approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect human subjects and ensure safe research methodology.

Giving a Voice to Stakeholders

Springer posits that a primary aim of action research is to give voice to the stakeholders.²⁴⁵ The stakeholders he refers to are those ordinary humans who experience the events being investigated. He says researchers tend to present data in “ponderous language” that obscures the significance of events and the experiences of participants.²⁴⁶ This is evident in much academic and government research that seeks to define homelessness. Definitions of terms used above such as sheltered and unsheltered homeless, chronically homeless, and addicted

²⁴⁴ Stringer, *Action Research*, 100.

²⁴⁵ Stringer, *Action Research*, 112.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

necessarily categorize circumstances in broad contexts that blur mitigating circumstances and objectify individuals and research subjects.

The more significant and life-altering experiences of people are the key elements that shape their character and personality and are the crucible where lasting hope and faith are formed. This action research project widens the scope of stakeholders beyond church leaders and policymakers to include volunteer workers and patrons who currently or have previously experienced homelessness. It avoids the more mainstream cognitive approach in research that has raised concern among some authors and seeks instead to study hope as perceived by ordinary people through their personal experiences in everyday life.²⁴⁷ It seeks to gather their ideas, present them in their own words, and discover hope-building solutions that benefit each category of stakeholders. In this way the project seeks to avoid the academic objectification of “third-party” research subjects, to seek their influence on the research goals, and to see that they benefit from the research.

Who Benefits From Action Research?

Much of the traditional academic research examined in the literature review above seeks to address some issue to the benefit of others but primarily benefits those sponsoring or conducting the research. It strengthens their own profit, position, or influence while forming paradigms of societal control that allow educated or powerful elites to impose their ideas and values on others. Sprinter’s candid assessment of this hypocritical undercurrent exposed some shallow thinking in this research project. The researcher initially sought to expertly identify core problems and then train workers and volunteers who were less adept at understanding or carrying

²⁴⁷ Krafft, Guse, and Marce, “Distinguishing Perceived Hope and Dispositional Optimism,” 218.

out Hope Station's mission. Stringer shows that the true stakeholders are the participants whose lives will be affected by the outcome of the research project. Reflecting on this challenge, the researcher had to stop seeing himself as the expert and strive to be more objective. It challenged him to see the participants as the real experts and to analyze and report the research findings in a way that is relevant to and within reach of the true stakeholders, the workers, and patrons of Hope Station.

Action Research Looks for Underlying Issues

Springer encourages communities to do "upstream" work that deals with the sources of problems rather than focusing only on surface issues. This is an ongoing challenge for agencies striving to serve individuals struggling with homelessness and addiction in Brevard. Much of the local resources go to alleviating the immediate impacts of homelessness such as the need for food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. It is easier in the near term to give someone immediate assistance than to help solve their underlying struggle with obtaining these things on their own. There are resources for job placement, psychological counseling, addiction treatment, procuring driver's licenses, finding affordable housing, and addressing other systemic issues that lead to or stem from homelessness. Cornerstone Church of God, through Hope Station, actively supports these second-tier initiatives but seems to be focused primarily on providing food and clothing. However, CCOG's primary and most significant function in bringing systemic change is building hope in Christ on an individual and community level. This hope is key to overcoming hopelessness and is therapeutic in addressing the systemic mental health problems, helplessness, and social isolation that contribute to homelessness and addiction.

Action Research Invites Collaboration

Stringer also encourages the collaborative participation of all stakeholders, whose lives are already affected by the problem, in collecting and analyzing data, clarifying procedures, identifying barriers, and applying findings in a real-world setting to find and better understand solutions. This requires informing all interested stakeholders of the goals and methods and welcoming their participation in developing the research framework and shaping the intentions. It invites them to shape outcomes and help determine what should be done to address the problem being investigated. Stringer asserts that using their diverse expert experience they can “repudiate social myths, misconceptions, and misrepresentations and formulate more constructive analyses of their situation.”²⁴⁸

Stringer’s discussion of a participatory approach to research is transformative to the approach of this action research project. The researcher’s initial approach involved identifying a problem held by others, formulating an expert solution, and applying it surreptitiously to gain an objective understanding of the effect it has on the problem. This approach stems from his former experience in physical science studies where objective outcomes depend on minimizing external influences. The researcher was (almost subconsciously) planning to avoid tainting or skewing the results by keeping the “big picture” confidential. He understood that participants need to be informed of the project and the elements that might affect them. However, he failed to consider that to understand better the problem themselves, stakeholders need to be involved in every aspect of exploring methods and solutions. This initial approach was not considerate of their views and would have cut the project off from critical ideas that could influence its outcome and efficacy. Research in the physical sciences relies upon the expert abilities of the researcher to

²⁴⁸ Stringer, *Action Research*, 15.

gather and analyze data and render a conclusive response. In human studies, the real experts are the ones experiencing the problem. Investigation using human subjects requires humility and openness to the experiences and interpretations of others. No one can approach Christ, Christian faith and hope, or the human condition as an expert. As action research requires a participatory approach, this project seeks to use initial interviews to garner consent and inform stakeholders of the project goals and methods. It will also use interactive interviews to solicit participant feedback on ministry goals, efficacy, and solutions.

Action Research Can Expose Blind Spots

This action research project has identified a tendency among Hope Station workers to focus on providing tangible relief services instead of focusing on inspiring hope. The thesis has built-in assumptions that the focus is the source of the problem, not the method. Stringer notes that people tend to follow daily routines that emerge from their shared experiences, that these routines are typically institutionalized practices within organizations, and that they may become so deeply ingrained that people are not conscious of how they may be influencing the problem being investigated.²⁴⁹ The ministry of Hope Station emerged out of a men's fellowship breakfast and grew into a community outreach. Providing a meal is the root of this outreach. Distributing clothing and other relief supplies became a natural extension of that. It is possible that the tendency toward providing relief services is organizational. As it grew into a community ministry, the expectations grew with it. The direction and the leadership of the ministry may have failed to establish and convey the goals of the ministry adequately. Though several attempts have been made to shift the focus toward an evangelistic instilling of hope, without structural

²⁴⁹ Stringer, *Action Research*, 135.

tools and procedures to guide this, the tendency has been to revert to what is familiar. It is important to recognize that the original men's ministry breakfast was focused on fellowship and discipleship but not specifically on building hope. The tendency, then, may be organic to the organization and not be a product of inadequate perceptions of hope. Interactive interviews will ask participants for their views on the effectiveness of Hope Station's efforts to build Christian hope and solicit feedback on what they believe may be hindering those efforts. These interviews should help the researcher and the participants discover whether this tendency is organic to the organization of Hope Station's ministry.

Action Research Can Illegitimately Challenge Established Authority

Action research can endanger the organizational structures that form the systems being examined and that drive action research. The action researcher can become a power broker who neutralizes power differentials, changes power dynamics, and alters the nature of power relations. Springer noted that, "Action research ultimately suffered a decline in favor because of its association with radical political activism in the 1960s."²⁵⁰ As it seeks to limit the ability of those in positions of authority to exercise power over marginalized groups, it affords the opportunity to redistribute power and carries the aroma of Marxist or socialist ideologies wherein marginalized groups usurp (sometimes violently) the existing societal power structures.

God establishes legitimate authority and sets men in positions of authority both in government (Rom 12) and within the church (1 Cor 12). Believers must proceed from a biblical standpoint wherein divine authority is invested in existing human authority to act as ministers of justice and righteousness charged with serving (Matt 23:11) and caring for the souls of the sheep

²⁵⁰ Stringer, *Action Research*, 63.

(Heb 13:17). Followers are charged with submitting to legitimate authority. For the believer, while action research is participatory and empowers other stakeholders to participate in reform, it must not become a mechanism for wresting power or usurping authority. In the United States military, it is said that authority can be delegated but responsibility cannot, meaning that while one may share the power to act, he cannot redistribute the responsibility to answer.²⁵¹ Likewise, the legitimate authority to lead within the church can be shared, but the responsibility to lead cannot be redistributed and should not be challenged inappropriately by those God places under authority. The writer of Hebrews clearly states the responsibility of the follower, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17, KJV).

Action research may be a dangerous tool and must be exercised with discretion and humility. This action research project seeks to act transparently under the informed consent of the existing legitimate authority structures of Cornerstone Church of God and Liberty University. This researcher is committed to honoring that authority and will immediately terminate the research if that consent is subsequently withdrawn. It informs each participant of the attendant risks and seeks their informed consent prior to their participation in any element of the action research project. That consent process provides information on how to withdraw their consent and guarantees the participant that their participation is completely voluntary and that their decision to participate or not participate will not alter their relationship with CCOG, Hope Station, or Liberty University. It further guarantees that their identity will be carefully protected,

²⁵¹ Joe Doty and Chuck Doty, “Command Responsibility and Accountability,” *Military Review*, Jan–Feb 2012, 36.

informs how their personally identifiable information will be protected and excluded from the research data, and assures that any data relevant to them will be excluded from the research if their consent is subsequently withdrawn. Finally, it offers each participant the contact information of the researcher, his faculty sponsor at Liberty University, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University.

Conclusion

Christian hope is founded upon divine agency and pathways. Divine agency stems from God's good will. Viable pathways arise from His beneficent intervention to bring about salvation and transformation into the image of Christ. This can lead to the following conclusions: Hope can be inspired by others. Providing immediate relief (food, cold water, clothing, etc.) can mitigate helplessness. Challenging unchristian and negative worldviews can mitigate feelings of hopelessness. Hope Station workers can help relieve suffering by always being ready to give an answer to the reason for their hope with meekness and fear (1 Pet 3:15). Action research is useful for exploring the efficacy of Hope Station's hope-building efforts that give voice to stakeholders at all levels. Action research is a safe methodology if research is performed and conclusions are drawn in deference to and under the oversight of established authorities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Purpose

This action research project seeks to shift the focus of Hope Station workers and patrons more toward instilling hope in divine agency and pathways while providing counseling, prayer, material services, and human interventions. The present focus is on human interventions, such that even the opening of the new outreach center has stirred questions about what material goods and services the church will be providing. Some workers feel overwhelmed and are struggling with burnout from the sheer magnitude of the intractable problems of homelessness. The focus on instilling lasting hope is sometimes met with dismay and confusion.

Motivation for the Research

If a person could rid the world of evil, would they? If so, how? Would they destroy the workers of evil? Would they take away the knowledge of evil? Would they take away the ability to choose evil? Or would they do good, be an example of good, teach others to do good, and offer them hope to follow after good? If so, how? It is not an innate righteousness that drives this researcher. It is a gracious call to follow Jesus and an earnest desire to know Him better. The journey leads this researcher to confront evil in his own experience in life and to experience personally the hope of better life offered in the gospel message. This hope is not limited to eternal things. It is a daily experience in the here and now. It is his sincere desire to offer this hope to others. This effort is two-fold, exploring hope personally through examining and teaching the Scripture within the church and through extending those ideas to others he

encounters in the world, especially those who are suffering, addicted, or imprisoned. It is hoping to see God do for them what He has so graciously done for him. “For we are saved by hope ...” (Rom 8:24).

Identifying the Problem To Be Researched

This action research project begins with identifying the problem to be researched. The problem gnaws at this researcher in his years-long work ministering to individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction. The experience driving the research is not manufactured for academic study but is lived out in the hardship of everyday ministry to individuals suffering through the intractable struggles of homelessness and addiction.

The researcher feels frustrated with the entrenched helplessness that keeps individuals from acting on the things that are within their reach. He believes that this helplessness extends from hopelessness. It seems to him that the experience of being knocked down over and over again causes many to stop trying to get up. Repeated failures dash their temporal hopes so many times that they become inoculated against hope. The gospel inspires some to have eternal hopes in the by and by, but any talk of temporal hope in the here and now seems naive. Does this lack of hope in God’s will or ability to help them temporally mean that their eternal hopes are also misinformed?

Relief workers can become hopeless themselves. Providing material relief seems to create dependency and appears to shift the ministry’s focus away from inspiring hope in Jesus. It seems the obvious problem is discovering how better to inspire genuine Christian hope, both temporal and eternal, in individuals who are mired in helplessness and hopelessness.

Defining Hope in the Context of the Problem Being Researched

It is necessary to first define hope within the context of the ministry of Hope Station to better understand whether it is something that can be conveyed or transferred to others. This is likely one of the more significant contributions of this action research project to the conversation of hope. Searching for a scholarly Christian definition of hope within modern scholarly writing is challenging. Building such a definition is daunting. This researcher scoured Christian texts and scholarly writings searching for a thorough definition that identifies the fundamental elements of hope. Each proposed definition proves weak in one way or another. With guidance from the Holy Spirit through much prayer, including midnight “wake-up-and-pray” calls, reflective meditation, and inner promptings to examine certain descriptions and examples of hope in the scriptures, this researcher hopefully offers a useful and unapologetically Christian definition of hope.

Defining and Differentiating Christian Hope

This action research project conducted a literature review to search out and consider what secular scholars have discovered and written about hope to understand more effectively and present hope within the context of the ministry of Hope Station. The researcher searched scholarly sources to identify definitions of hope and key elements of hope discovered by both Christian and secular researchers. The church has a corner on hope because hope is ultimately anchored in God’s work to unite everything in heaven and earth in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:10). Yet, the Christian perspective of hope cannot stand apart from the insights offered through other men. The Scripture presents the gospel within the framework of the human experience, confronting men in their isolation from God. The good tidings of great joy are offered to all people and are received by all in their immediate condition (Luke 2:8–20). The Scriptures speak to the ordinary

person, not the theologian. God even uses the secular prenuptial preparation of Persian candidates for queen in the book of Esther as an example of his preparation of the Bride of Christ. Jesus, Himself presents an enigmatic idea of the children of the world man being wiser in their generation than the children of light (Luke 16:8). Jesus also offers numerous references to everyday life experiences in his presentation of the truths of the kingdom of God. In this light, this action research project cannot afford to overlook secular ideas of hope, for it is to the lost and the wayfaring man that the hope of the gospel is presented. Hope Station functions at this level introducing hope in the common daily experiences of those struggling with homelessness and addiction.

Hope Is Unapologetically Christian

The researcher, guided by the Holy Spirit through reflection, study of the Scripture, and personal observation, began to understand that hope is unapologetically Christian. Without Jesus Christ, people are alienated from God and without hope in this present world and in the world to come (1 Cor 15:19; Eph 2:12; 1 Thes 4:13). This centrality of Christ in hope should be evident in the personal definitions of hope provided by the research participants. The researcher also discovered that hope is not invented or manufactured but is born of, witnessed, or personally experienced through tribulation and suffering (Rom 5:1–5). Without suffering, there is no need for hope; for hope is the very expectancy of deliverance out of the present circumstance and into a better one. The significance of suffering in the formation of hope should be evident in participant responses to questions about defining hope and dealing with hopelessness. The researcher will examine participant responses to identify expressions of their source of hope and its centrality in Jesus Christ.

Differentiating Hope From Optimism

The action research project will utilize initial interviews and interactive questionnaires to assess participant concepts of hope. The researcher will examine participant responses to not only identify the need for hope but to also differentiate that hope from optimism. Initial interviews will precede any individual or group discussion of the sources or definitions of hope or optimism. The initial interviews will be informal. While seeking to invite participants into a more open discussion of hope, they will also help inform the researcher of subsequent changes in the manner in which participants identify hope or its source. Interactive discussions will inform participants of the theological and theoretical definitions and sources of hope identified within the conceptual framework in Chapter Two of the action research project. These discussions will address conceptual differences between hope and optimism, especially as they differ in their reliance on agency and pathways. These discussions should help Hope Station workers begin to assess ways they can better convey hope to Hope Station visitors and patrons. Responses from participants to the subsequent questions in the interactive interviews should reflect a growing understanding of the differences between hope and optimism.

Identifying Temporal and Eternal Hope

Participants should express both temporal and eternal hope. That which is seen is not hope, but it can inspire hope that things will continue to improve. Participant interviews should reveal an awareness that their efforts to provide temporal relief can inspire hope that things will get better for the patrons. That which is seen is also temporal, not eternal (2 Cor 4:18), but the experience of temporal deliverance in this world inspires hope in the eternal (Heb 2:1–3; Eph 1:12–14). Fellowship with Christ and other believers in this world also builds hope in the eternal. This temporal experience combined with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13–14)

informs their eternal fellowship and hope. Participant interviews should also show an awareness that this temporal hope can help individuals develop eternal hope.

Finding Patience in Hope

Patience is a recurrent theme in hope, though the urgency of hope seems to contradict patience even in common idioms such as, “I cannot wait” or to “wait with bated breath.”

Patience in hope is not born of some controlled urgency of the present condition but of personal or vicarious experience of deliverance through trial, tribulation, and suffering (Rom 5:1–5; Jas 5:7–11; 1 Pet 1:3–11). Participant interviews should uncover patience as a key element in hope. It should be evident in how they deal with hopelessness themselves and in why they feel Hope Station is not more effective in conveying hope to others. Their own patient continuance in hope should be evident in their responses.

Hope Station workers must identify God, and more specifically Jesus Christ, as the source of Christian hope. The challenge is to provide temporal material relief while showing that the true source of hope is in Jesus. The researcher anticipates that the focus of Hope Station in providing material relief is shifting the focus of workers away from trying to inspire hope in Jesus. This shift toward ameliorating temporal suffering to provide hope should be expressed in the initial interviews. These interviews should also begin to uncover any lack of awareness of the value of temporal suffering in the formation of hope. Discussion during the interactive interviews should raise awareness of the loss of focus on pointing patrons toward Jesus Christ as the true source of hope. Subsequent responses to the interactive questions should show a greater awareness of this shift. The researcher will attempt to identify statements that express awareness of participants of their focus on providing material relief and any evidence of a shift toward or away from pointing patrons to Jesus Christ as the true source of hope.

Understanding Internal and External Agency in Hope

Snyder attributes agency in hope primarily to inward thought processes that motivate an individual to achieve specific goals. It then becomes necessary to identify whether Snyder and/or other researchers envision external agency as a motivational element in hope. Furthermore, it becomes essential to understand and describe the inner aspect of divine agency in motivating individuals toward goals.

The inner work of the Holy Spirit within the believer takes place at such a foundational level that it begins to reshape their being in what the apostle Paul refers to as being transformed by the renewing of the mind rather than being conformed to the world (Rom 12:2). That consequential renewing of the mind alters that person's fundamental state of being. It goes beyond mere conformity to an external standard. It becomes instead the expression of an inward transformation into a new creature that is suddenly and wonderfully alive (Rom 6:11, 13) to divine influences (1 Cor 4:1–9, 17–19a) and able to know and prove the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2).

This change is so fundamental that the operation of the Holy Spirit in an individual is described as producing fruit rather than performing good works. This is much like a tree that bears a fruitful product of its being. It does not merely perform some external work through manual effort on the external environment (like a person manually manipulating a tool to alter something external to themselves). It is not even an effort to conform to some external standard. It is so transformative that it proceeds from the very motivational source of the person. It is fruit.

The fruit-versus-work aspect is understood so disparately by Jesus that He states that it is impossible for something corrupt to bring forth good fruit (Matt 7:17–23; 12:33–37). Good fruit is a good, expressed product of a person's very nature and being. While a corrupt person could perform good works, they could not produce good fruit as an expression of their very nature. For

instance, a tree could grow alongside a stream bed and alter the course of that stream in some beneficial way. But, doing so would not improve the nature the tree or of the fruit it produces. So then, it becomes critically necessary to differentiate fruit from works. It is also essential to understand that good works can be either an expression of good fruit proceeding from a tree whose nature is good, or they can be the expression of the evil tree that has some temporal benefit apart from the nature of the tree itself. The work being beneficial somehow does not make the tree or its fruit good. Good is a state of being, not a measure of products or influences a person or object has within their environment. It is a statement regarding innate nature, not apparent outcomes.

This action research project will utilize Snyder's Adult Hope Scale to assess hope levels in participants. Snyder's hope scale focuses on measuring belief in both the ability of an individual to act to move toward an improved state and the ability to find viable pathways through which to achieve that improved state. This is a measure of the individual's perceptions, not their actual abilities or the actual viability of their esteemed pathways. The achievability of the desired state does reveal whether the hope is realistic or vain. However, whether they actually achieve the improved state is not a necessary measure of their level of hope. Though they can be influenced by external factors, beliefs are internal elements. Snyder essentially is measuring affect within the individual eliciting responses that indicate their mood or emotional disposition toward their ability to achieve their desired state and their perceptions of their ability to find viable pathways. This internal disposition is more than a measure of mood as it motivates behavior that moves the individual toward the desired state. In this context, hope can be understood as fruit that proceeds from the inner character of the individual, not merely as a response to external influences. The apostle Paul also lists hope among other fruits of the Spirit

such as love, kindness, and patience (Rom 12:2). This is not to say that Snyder's Adult Hope Scale can be used as a measure of the fruit of the Spirit, only that hope, as a fruit of the Spirit, can influence the level of hope measured by the Adult Hope Scale. This study anticipates that the work of the Holy Spirit within believers in Jesus Christ will positively influence their level of hope as measured by the Adult Hope Scale apart from their external circumstances and influences.

Gathering Quantitative and Qualitative Data

This research project uses quantitative and qualitative methods to quantify and evaluate hope among study participants. The quantitative data will be gathered using the Adult Hope Scale that was developed by C. R. Snyder, professor of psychology at the University of Kansas.¹ The interviews conducted throughout the project will seek to gather qualitative data that can help the researcher assess and quantify levels of hope in the participants. They will also provide an opportunity for instruction and feedback to help Hope Station workers gain a deeper understanding of the researcher's concept of biblical Christian hope, to learn to apply it to areas of hopelessness in their own lives, to convey it to others better, and to help others apply it to their lives. This project aims to help Hope Station identify the true nature of biblical Christian hope and its relevance to the individual experiences and perspectives of Hope Station workers and patrons. The data that is gathered should help sharpen the vision of hope ministry, shift the focus of Hope Station toward the ministry of hope, and improve other ministry functions through which Hope Station provides material services.

¹ Shanahan, "Hope, Optimism, and Affect," 1.

Identifying Presupposition

The question of how Hope Station can be more effective is couched in the presupposition of the researcher that there was within the community and the church an overarching sense of hopelessness concerning the issue of homelessness and addiction. The researcher feels that this stems from the intractable nature of the problems faced. This not only influences the thesis and problem statements but also steers the researcher's discussion of the ministry context.

Defining the Ministry Context of the Action Research Project

The researcher approaches this action research project through a comprehensive description of Hope Station's ministry context in Chapter One. The outreach ministry and corresponding research environment are embedded in the local church. The researcher approaches this aspect of the contextual framework through the lens of Cornerstone Church of God's (CCOG) place within the broader influence of the Church of God denomination headquartered in Cleveland, Tennessee. The researcher includes statistical and demographic data on the membership of the Church of God and their worldview. This data is available online from the Pew Research Center and is deemed to be characteristic of the local congregation of CCOG. This is followed by a discussion of the geographic, economic, and social conditions surrounding the church, the congregation's history, and CCOG's historical disposition toward the homeless and addicted persons who traverse the church property. Hope Station participated in hurricane relief with Broadway Community Church (BCC) during the research project. As they are a sister church with CCOG within the Church of God denomination, the researcher also presents a brief introductory overview of Broadway Community Church (BCC) and their shared ministry context.

The researcher then discusses the background context for Hope Station's ministry, especially as it formed around a ministry to individuals struggling with homelessness and addiction. He draws this information from his ministry experience with Hope Station, having been active there since its formation. He presents the ministry's goals within the framework of his ministry leadership and his participation in forming the vision for the ministry. He includes firsthand information from seeking to build the Hope Station's ministry in partnership with other relief agencies and parachurch organizations. He shares relevant information about the shifts in ministry efforts both onsite and offsite during the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of the new outreach center. He makes references to changes in the legal landscape. This information also stems partly from his experience serving with and leading the ministry through these transitions.

As Hope Station's ministry and volunteer support flow out of CCOG, the researcher briefly discusses CCOG's financial and material support of Hope Station. He provides information about CCOG's view of the biblical basis for that support and their redirection of funds to stretch their limited financial resources. This includes facts about the distribution of funds, use of facilities and utilities, and the division of labor and responsibilities, both for staff and volunteer. It also outlines the sharing of resources from volunteers, donors, and from other agencies including food, clothing, building materials, and transportation.

Identifying the Target Population

This action research project asks a question: How can Hope Station be more effective in its effort to present the gospel within its ministry context in downtown Melbourne, Florida? This question grows out of an awareness that the ministry's approach to evangelism is to deliver a

message of hope to those individuals who struggle with homelessness and addiction and who surround and regularly traverse the church property

The scenario is intimidating. The target population is often disheveled and disconnected from the local congregation, showing little or no apparent interest in the values and mission of the church. This disconnect reflects a significant disparity within the community between the presence and purpose of the homeless or addicted person and the presence and purpose of the church. The disparate interests of other members of the community further influence this.

The church has many ministry alternatives and can shift the focus toward other less intimidating population groups surrounding the church, including residents and business owners, elderly and shut-ins, local schools and college students, professionals, healthcare workers, etc. But the ones who come across the property and present the most immediate and desperate needs are people experiencing homelessness and people with an addiction. This is the primary context of Hope Station's ministry. This research project focuses on better presenting a message of hope within the context of the current ministry of Hope Station. The question centers on the church's ministry to this particular population rather than shifting the focus to other groups.

The researcher seeks to provide a thorough description of the target population for the ministry of Hope Station. He presents key statistical information from local newspapers and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (from the internet) regarding the size of the local homeless population in Brevard County. He includes a brief discussion of the reliability of the local statistical information and how it is gathered. He supports this with his own observations about what draws individuals to Brevard County, their living conditions, their transportation options, and the availability of shelter and bathrooms. Much of this information is from undocumented interviews and discussions with homeless and addicted persons visiting

CCOG and Hope Station and from site visits to homeless encampments. He includes references about the availability of counseling and recovery programs from his own work providing onsite informal pastoral counseling. Information about laws governing mental health services was gleaned from online sources of the State of Florida. Other information about the interaction of law enforcement and other local agencies and the local disposition toward the homeless came from informal interviews, local media, and online posts from government officials.

Intervention Design

Methodology for Meetings and Interviews

From the onset, the project will meet and consult with supervisory leadership at Cornerstone Church of God to explain the study and seek their support. Group meetings will inform stakeholders of the project and solicit their consent and participation. These will be held onsite at Cornerstone Church of God (CCOG) or Hope Station (HS). Individual introductory interviews (see Appendix A) will help introduce the project to participants. These will take place either onsite at CCOG, HS, or offsite at a location and time agreed upon by the participant.

Intermittent interviews will be conducted in the same manner as above. The researcher will meet with the participant in a neutral setting, usually over lunch, and conduct the interview following an interactive questionnaire (see Appendix B). This questionnaire will serve to guide the conversation toward three key questions. The same questions will be presented to each participant. The questions are designed to focus participants on their exercise of hope personally and within the context of their participation in the ministry of Hope Station. All relevant participant responses will be recorded verbatim by hand. The responses will be read back to the participant after each question to check for accuracy and to ensure that what is recorded accurately conveys the intent of their responses. Any changes will be made as needed before

proceeding to the next question. The notes from the interview will then be transcribed into a digital format for editing, contextual evaluation, and statistical assessment.

Initial interviews will explain that the intent of the action research project is to help participants identify and better understand the ways that Hope Station tends to provide interventions and solutions rather than instilling hope. The researcher will also explain that the goal is to identify ways to shift focus toward building hope in God, both temporally and eternally. Subsequent interviews will discuss the differences between hope and optimism and the reliance of hope upon agency and pathways. It will clarify differences between human, divinely inspired, and divine agency and pathways.

Adult Hope Scale Assessments

Individual hope assessments will be conducted in the same manner or at the same time as above and will utilize the Adult Hope Scale² (see Appendix E), a standardized tool for measuring hope levels. The use of this scale will be within the blanket approval for academic use (see Appendix E) and will follow the approval of the IRB (see Appendix D). The participant will be given a copy of the Adult Hope Scale, including a copy of the Likert scale that they can write on to record their responses manually. The researcher will be available to assist the participant or explain the scale as needed. Care will be taken not to discuss particular questions in a manner that may alter or skew the participant's responses. The participant will be given as much time as they need to complete this portion of the hope assessment. If needed, the researcher will read the Adult Hope Scale questions to the participants and record their responses on the Likert Scale.

² C. R. Snyder et al., "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60, no. 4, April 1991: 570–85. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.4.570>.

The researcher may be confident in the responses to questions that have to be read to participants, as the Adult Hope Scale has been shown to be reliable even when read to older participants with cognitive impairment so long as they are proficient in English and are able to understand and respond to the questions.³ These responses will also be transcribed at a later time into a digital format for editing, contextual evaluation, and statistical assessment.

Identifying Consensus

Participant interviews will seek to gain a better understanding of their current perspectives and experiences concerning hope and their role in giving and receiving ministry. This will include inviting informal discussion about their perspectives on the history of their experiences that have led them to this place in ministry and the place of this ministry within the church. The goal is to develop a clearer understanding of their perceptions of Christian hope. This will include inviting their perspectives on the stated problem for the action research project and assessing later whether there is true consensus about the problem being researched.

The intervention will utilize individual and group discussion to identify and develop a clear, concise, and accurate consensus of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons within the ministry setting of Hope Station. These discussions will invite participants to compare the ideas presented in the interviews with the Christian hope themes conveyed in the Scriptures. The researcher will attempt to identify and discuss the differences between hope and optimism as discussed in the Theological Foundations and Theoretical Foundations in the chapters above. Key scriptures about hope will be discussed. The discussion will seek to

³ Diana DiGasbarro, "Reliability and Validity of the Adult Hope Scale among Nursing Home Residents with and without Cognitive Impairment," *Clinical Gerontologist* 43, no. 3 (2019): 340–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07317115.2019.1656696>.

incorporate insights and concerns of the stakeholders and participants. The findings may be used to develop tools for conveying the consolidated portrait of hope to workers and patrons. Hope levels will be measured using the approved standardized tools for measuring hope. These tools along with follow-up interviews may be used again later to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

Documenting Verbatim Interviews

Verbatim interviews will be textually analyzed to identify recurring and dominant themes in the stakeholders' and participants' terminology. The identity of the participants and their individual responses will only be known to the researcher. The researcher will carefully transcribe the participant responses from the interviews and Adult Hope Scale assessments into a digital document, free of any personally identifying information. The researcher will then assign a sequential number to the set of data from each participant. Only digital documents, free of any personally identifying information, will be used as a data source for online textual analysis. These steps are taken to protect the identity of the participants and prevent anyone from personally associating them with their particular responses or with any particular findings of the action research project. This researcher will import the transcribed participant responses only, free from any personally identifying information, into online textual assessment tools in order to identify any recurring themes. Any identified shared themes will then be used to guide the researcher in manually evaluating the contextual responses of the participants to identify and correlate more specifically any shared values and ideas as well as any specific areas of concern. The findings will be reported along with the findings of the Adult Hope Scale assessments in the action research project. At no time will the participants' personally identifiable information be

entered into or stored in any computer, digital device, or on any digital documents associated with this action research project.

Needed Approval and Resources

This action research project will need approval from the project mentors and professors and the institutional review board (IRB) at Liberty University. It will also need the approval of the senior pastor and council of Cornerstone Church of God. Stakeholders will also need to provide informed consent to participate in the project. The initial interview with participants will include an invitation to participate in the action research project and an informative request for written informed consent (see Appendix E). The project will also need approval to utilize standardized assessment tools such as the Adult Hope Scale⁴ (See Appendix C) or the Hersh Hope Index⁵ (See Appendix F). It will need printing resources to make interview assessment sheets and instructional materials. Funds will also be needed for qualitative textual analysis and to support informal interviews over lunch/coffee, etc.

Identifying Participants

The project will begin identifying participants and gaining consent and conducting purposive interviews as soon as the IRB grants approval. Participants will be sought from among the leadership of Cornerstone Church of God, workers who are active in the ministry of Hope Station, members of the local homeless community who have a history of interaction with Hope

⁴ Snyder et al., "The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope," 570–85.

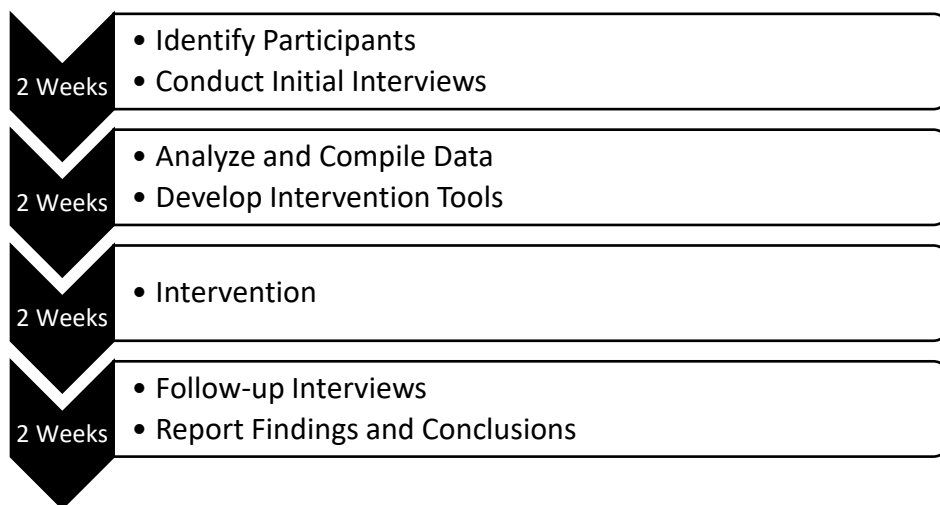
⁵ Tone RustØen et al., "Hope in the General Norwegian Population, Measured using the Herth Hope Index," *Palliative & Supportive Care* 1, no. 4 (12, 2003): 309–18.

Station, and patrons of Hope Station who present for services. These will be interviewed individually or in groups to obtain consent for participation.

Project Duration and Timeline

The project will likely need to be at least two months (see fig. 1). This will consist of two weeks to identify participants and conduct initial interviews. Another two weeks will be devoted to analyzing and compiling data and developing intervention tools. The intervention itself will take at least two weeks. This will be followed by a two-week period of follow-up interviews and reporting on findings and conclusions.

Table 3.1 Action research project timeline



Identifying Successful Outcomes

A successful outcome could manifest in at least four ways (see fig. 2). Participants will better understand the mission of Hope Station in building Christian hope in the community. They will exhibit an improvement in their own personal level of hope. They will begin to inspire hope more effectively in others. They will be better able to articulate their understanding of hope as it relates to the present situation, their own or that of others.

An increase in understanding of the mission of Hope Station should be expressed in subsequent interviews and in a shift in the focus of the participants on building Christian hope. Subsequent interviews and hope assessments should exhibit an improvement in personal hope levels among participants that should also be evident in their participation in the ministry of Hope Station. That participation should also show an increased ability and effort to inspire hope in others. An improved ability to articulate their understanding of hope may be seen in subsequent interviews and in their conversation with other patrons and workers at Hope Station.

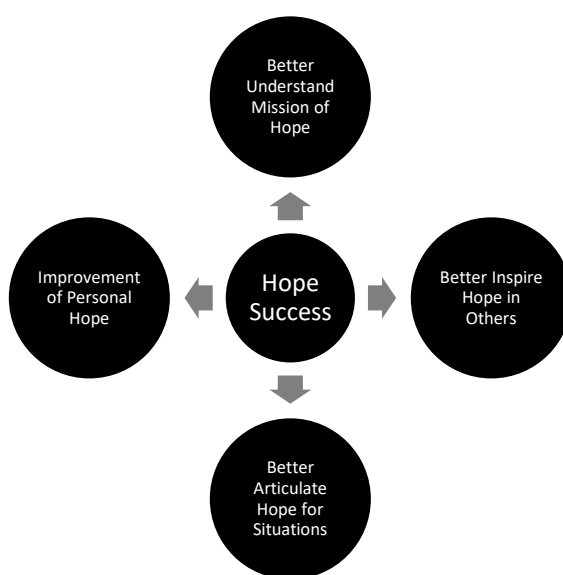


Figure 3.1 Identifying successful outcomes

How This Project Differs from Others

This action research project will differ from the methods of other cited works. These works utilized questionnaires, surveys, and literature reviews. They employed standardized tools for assessing hope, optimism, anxiety, depression, or suicidal behaviors. Some utilized interventions such as dignity therapy and hope treatment. Dignity therapy focuses on improving hope and quality of life by raising the participants' sense of competence and value by

encouraging them to talk about their feelings, desires, and what they find important.⁶ One sought to build temporal hope through a Bible-based approach to hope treatment that included a defined approach to human agency and pathways.⁷ It taught participants to exercise their own personal agency and to conceive of and create their own pathways out of poverty, with inspiration and direction from God (Phil 4:13; Prov 3:6) and help from investors.

This action research project will conduct field research at Hope Station using purposive interviews, standardized tools, and hope treatment that focuses on divine agency and pathways. Whereas local resources already provide human agency and pathways, this study seeks to inspire transcendent hope in divine agency and pathways. Participants will be urged to see that God has a plan for their lives and is active in moving them toward a meaningful end (Jer. 28:11–13). The project will seek to raise awareness that God’s plan may or may not meet their immediate expectations of human agency or material relief. It will encourage participants to develop hope in God by seeking, relying upon, and trusting God for His temporal and eternal agency and pathways. This will include raising awareness of the value and divine purpose of both human suffering and Christian suffering (e.g., as Corrie and Elisabeth ten Boom found hope, divine agency and pathways, and purpose amid their political and religious persecution and suffering in Ravensbrück concentration camp where Elisabeth eventually died,⁸ and other biblical examples).

⁶ Rahimi, et al., “Dignity Therapy Improves Hope and Quality of Life in Cancer Patients,” 156.

⁷ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 2.

⁸ Corrie ten Boom, John Sherrill, and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central, 133–46.

How Hope Will Be Measured

Hope will be measured with the Adult Hope Scale⁹ (see Appendix C) or the Herth Hope Index (see Appendix F),¹⁰ whichever is approved for use. The hope scales will be utilized to measure levels of hope before and after the intervention. Purposive interviews will be used to clarify the current understanding of hope, identify the consensus of the problem, and modify the intervention toward the specifics of the problem. The intent of the intervention is to move the participants' understanding of hope toward a reliance upon divine agency and pathways in hope. The project will keep a written, verbatim record or audio recording of each interview. Each interview will ask the following questions:

- How do you feel about Hope Station's ability to inspire hope in others?
- How do you deal with hopelessness?
- What is the reason you feel Hope Station is not more successful in inspiring hope in others?

Managing Presupposition

The project will be attentive to presuppositions regarding hope. It will also seek to identify and avert any tendency toward avoidance or the adaption of preexisting views rather than those of the participants. A reflective journal will be kept recording any identified presuppositions or responses and the experiences that clarify them.

Continuity of Data Collection

Some participants will likely drop out because of the transient and unstable nature of homelessness. The project will anonymously include the findings of all interviews. It will attempt to only use data from hope scale instruments for those participants who are able to

⁹ Deborah J. Persell, "Vehicle of Hope," *The Nursing Clinics of North America* 51, no. 4 (2016): 697–721, 706–9.

¹⁰ RustØen et al. "Hope in the General Norwegian Population, 309–18.

complete assessments both before and after the intervention. To achieve this, it will seek at least twenty participants to ensure valid data will remain if as many as half of the participants drop out. If an insufficient number of participants remain, it will collate, interpret, and summarize all the data gathered and specify that any conclusions will need to be verified/validated by a study of a larger group. The project can alternatively correlate each conclusive finding with data from each interview and survey that supports that finding.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Finding Participants

Advertising and flyers were not useful for finding participants in this project. All participants were contacted individually and invited to participate. The inherent risk in this is that participant selection criteria or preference may influence the objectivity of the data gathered and hence the outcome and findings of the study.

Conducting Interviews

All interviews were conducted by the researcher. They were performed discreetly and one-on-one in an informal setting, either at Hope Station or over lunch in a nearby restaurant. The methodology that was followed was to have an informal greeting and personal discussion. Afterward, the researcher established that the reason for the interview was to support the action research project with the permission of the leadership at Cornerstone Church of God and under the supervision of Liberty University. The researcher or the participant then read over the purpose of the study and the informed consent, being careful to answer or clarify any questions about the purpose or oversight of the project. Each participant was informed of the scope and requirements of their participation, what they would be asked to do, and the risks involved. They

were also told of their right to opt-out at any time without any negative consequences, their right to have their participation deleted from the project, and how to contact the researcher and the university.

Interviews were held in informal settings and time was allotted during the interviews to record the participants' responses verbatim. Verbal permission was gained before proceeding with any discussions that could be overheard by others. After each response, the researcher clarified with the participants what was recorded to ensure it accurately reflected their response before the interview continued.

Focusing on Understanding and Describing Hope

It became apparent early in the initial interviews that the study participants already had a high level of hope. The planned intervention became impractical as the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Ian on Florida fundamentally altered the ministry approach at Hope Station. It was clear also that Hope Station workers nearly unanimously expressed a view of Christian hope that is anchored in a biblical worldview, in prayer and meditation, and in their own personal reliance on and faith in Jesus Christ. The researcher shifted the intervention phase from developing tools to increase the levels of hope among Hope Station workers to using the interactive interview as a tool to understand better and describe hope among the participants. The researcher also sought to understand better the barriers to success at Hope Station through the eyes of the participant's whose concerns centered primarily on the receptivity of the target audience to the gospel message.

Measuring Hope

Hope was measured using the standardized Adult Hope scale, a twelve-item self-assessment using a symmetric Likert scale. Specifically, the scale measures on an eight-point scale the degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of twelve statements. Four of these statements refer to a person's disposition toward their own achievement, namely how intensely they pursue goals, how well their life experiences have prepared them for the future, how they perceive their own level of success in life, and whether they meet their own goals. These responses are used to measure agency, their capable and willful movement toward their own goals. The four statements used to measure pathways refer to a person's resilience to finding new pathways when presented with obstacles, namely thinking of ways out of a jam, their perception that there are lots of ways around a problem, their ability to think of many ways to get what is important to them in life, and their perceived ability to solve problems when others become discouraged. The survey also contains four fillers or detractors that refer to whether they feel tired, are easily downed in arguments, worry about their health, or find themselves worrying about things.

At the end of the interviews, the researcher provided each participant with a blank Adult Hope Scale, explained the Likert scale that is used in the survey, and gave sufficient time to complete it. The researcher answered any questions asked by the participants but was careful to encourage them to record their initial responses without spending too much time thinking about any item on the scale. When anyone expressed difficulty reading the survey items, the researcher read it to them. The researcher is confident in the responses to questions that had to be read to participants as the Adult Hope Scale has been shown to be reliable even when read to older

participants with cognitive impairment so long as they were proficient in English and were able to understand and respond to the questions.¹¹

Data Collection and Management

Data was initially collected and recorded on the forms approved by the Institutional Review Board. Most participants provided their interview responses verbally and they were written out verbatim by the researcher, though two participants wrote down their own responses. Most participants completed the Adult Hope Scale on their own at the end of their interview. The researcher transcribed the interview data verbatim into a Microsoft Word processing file, separating the responses from any personally identifiable information about the study participants and grouping the responses according to the interview questions. This data, absent any personally identifiable information, was then used to cut and paste into various applications for qualitative and quantitative analysis. The researcher also transcribed the Adult Hope Scale data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for statistical analysis without including any personally identifiable information.

Rather than relying on a single data stream, this action research project seeks to employ various research methods to achieve data triangulation that will better corroborate the study findings. The project will use direct observation, purposive interviews, and standardized assessments to identify patterns and common themes in participant responses and hope levels. Using a variety of research methods the researcher hopes to improve not only the validity, but the credibility of the data collected.

¹¹ DiGasbarro, "Reliability and Validity of the Adult Hope Scale among Nursing Home Residents with and without Cognitive Impairment, 340–49.

Statistical Analysis of Adult Hope Scale Responses

Adult Hope Scale responses were transcribed into a spreadsheet without any personally identifying information. They were placed in a table aligning the responses with the question numbers. Four of the twelve questions in the scale pertain to agency in hope and four pertain to pathways. The other four questions in the scale are detractors. The responses were tallied to render an agency score, a pathways score, and a composite score that sums both agency and pathways. They were also color-coded to identify whether the combined scores for each category were considered hopeful, moderately hopeful, or highly hopeful. The average and standard deviation were calculated for each category: agency, pathways, and composite. The standard deviation for each category was then plotted on a graph with the horizontal axis representing the scores for each participant and the vertical axis representing the frequency of the occurrence of the scores among participants. Each graph generated a bell curve showing a symmetric (normal) Gaussian distribution of data values around the mean. This illustrates the reliability of the data in that it follows a natural variation and likely does not have any variations that significantly skew the results.

Generating Word Clouds

Word clouds were generated using open-source applications (MonkeyLearn Word Cloud Generator, TagCrowd, ABCya, and WordClouds.com). No personally identifiable information was used in generating word clouds. MonkeyLearn Word Cloud Generator uses artificial intelligence to group words and phrases and enables the user to visualize raw data for relevance and frequency of responses. ABCya is simpler and more automated but gives quick and colorful word clouds that can be compared with the results from more sophisticated tools. TagCrowd enables the researcher to include word frequencies in the visualizations for analysis and

WordClouds.com is versatile and allows the researcher to edit and correct word lists. A variety of word cloud generators was used to compare and contrast renderings and to enable the researcher to choose, subjectively, those that were deemed most intuitive and accurate for displaying the sentiment of the participant responses to the interview questions. Word clouds were not always particularly helpful in identifying core themes from participants' responses.

Manually Identifying Core Themes

To identify core themes from the participant responses, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions of the participants' statements individually and critically looking for key words and ideas. These were highlighted using different colors to better correlate their occurrences across a variety of participant responses. These transcriptions were also appended with supporting statements from the same participants made in their initial interview to identify common themes that may have been shared initially but were not restated in the interactive interviews.

Building Multi-Level Donut Charts

The verbatim responses of the participants to the questions in the interactive interviews were separated from any personally identifiable information and were pasted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. They were grouped according to the interview question. The grouped statements were then pasted into separate Excel spreadsheets that correspond with each interview question. These statements were manually reviewed to identify prevailing themes and were assigned codes to group those themes for statistical analysis. A key verbatim statement was selected for each code that best represented the theme of that group of statements. A table of the occurrence of each themed code as it applied to participant responses was built in descending

order of frequency. These tables were then used to build multi-level donut charts that display the frequency of the occurrence of themed codes. The key statements were used to represent each theme in the descriptions that accompany the donut charts. Though some steps involve subjective selection and interpretation, the overall process is deemed by the researcher to be as objective an approach as is practicable.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

First-Hand Observation of the Need for Hope

The need for hope is apparent in the daily ministry of Hope Station to individuals struggling through hopelessness brought on by homelessness and addiction. The researcher also observed the need for hope first-hand in the living testimonies of Hurricane Ian survivors on Pine Island. Hope stood apart from any general optimism that things would inevitably get better. Survivors repeatedly expressed their gratitude to God for miraculously delivering and sparing their lives. This kind of gratitude was personal. They expressed it in a personal way toward God and the rescuers and relief workers who intervened on their behalf. Their expressions of gratitude also carried descriptions of their hope. Without any coaching, they openly described the agency and pathways that distinguished their hope from mere optimism. Their hope grew as they began to recover from the initial shock of their experiences. They shared their stories with relief workers and with one another as they expressed growing confidence that God had personally spared them and would help them through the ongoing struggle to rebuild their lives. Their expectancy was evident as their disposition shifted from despair to hope in their struggle to recover. The researcher witnessed this hope inspire many to redirect their relief to other neighbors who they believed were in even greater duress saying, “Help them, they need it more than we do.” Small victories became catalysts for even greater hope. It is more than optimism. Hope multiplied as people linked arms to help one another. It is a moving and powerful transition from despair to hope that emerged among the survivors on Pine Island.

Identifying Temporal and Eternal Hope

One does not have to hope for relief that can be clearly seen. The arrival of relief at Pine Island clearly inspired both temporal and eternal hope. The reliance of temporal hope on eternal hope is very evident in the testimonies of two study participants who exclaimed that they have not experienced hopelessness since turning their lives over to Jesus Christ. This expression of hope is more than an expression of temporal contentment. Contentment is being pleased to continue in their present state. Christian contentment, like Christian hope, rests upon an awareness of the eternal fellowship of believers. (Rom 9:24–25; 1 Tim 6:6–8). Though it expresses hope, contentment can be differentiated from hope. Hope desires and anticipates change for the better. Hope is not seen, and though one may hope for temporal things, Christian hope is ultimately looking for eternal things. Realizing temporal hopes strengthens the confident expectation of eternal ones.

Experiences That Framed the Researcher’s Perspective of Hope

This patient experience of hope is not only visible in the interviews and observations of this action research project; it is the experience of this researcher on his own path of spiritual growth and cleansing. Cleansing, like judgment, must begin at the house of the Lord. It must begin in the inward parts, not externally, as is common with man. Christopher Knapp insightfully points this out in his writings concerning the reformation of the temple and temple worship under Hezekiah.¹ There was cleansing and repair of God’s house that began on the inside. For this work, this researcher seemed especially suited. He was tasked with the daily work of repairing, cleansing, and rebuilding the church after decades of neglect. This researcher scrubbed floors,

¹ Christopher Knapp, *Kings of Judah and Israel* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1997), 123–24.

chipped and replaced paint and tile, repaired walls, mowed grass, cleaned toilets, scrubbed showers, patched roofs, cut trees, planted sod and bushes, repaired drain pipes, and moved furniture—doing the mundane work of the ministry. It was an outward expression of an inner work. While tending to physical structures of the church, he was able through prayer and personal example to help others overcome the pernicious indifference that was sometimes expressed toward outsiders. As Knapp describes, this is precisely what was done to prepare the temple for the coming revival. The temple building was not the only thing that needed renewal. The priests and Levites needed to cleanse themselves also. Old, neglected ideas had to be dusted off and be made new. These experiences helped shape the perspective through which this researcher approached the concept of Christian hope.

Finding Patience in Hope

The necessity of patience in hope was evident throughout this research project. Hope Station workers expressed an understanding that meaningful change takes time. They demonstrated this understanding through their faithful labor ministering to the same people week after week, whose lives are ravaged by the experiences of homelessness and addiction. It was a repeated theme in the testimonies of the research participants and in the transition from despair to hope that this researcher saw firsthand in the Hurricane Ian survivors. It was evident in the diligent day-by-day recovery efforts of the Hurricane Ian rescuers and survivors.

Differentiating Christian Hope From Temporal Relief

Even when efforts centered on material relief, it was evident early on that the participants in this action research project, Hope Station workers and Hurricane Ian survivors, identified God, and more specifically Jesus Christ, as the source of their hope. The researcher anticipated that the

focus on providing tangible relief within the ministry context of Hope Station would produce a shift away from hope in Jesus Christ toward material sources of hope. However, the survey of Hope Station workers and patrons using the Adult Hope Scale yielded consistent results showing an elevated consensus of hope already resident within the patrons and volunteers who participated in the project. The participant interviews demonstrated that that elevated consensus of hope is firmly rooted in their personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

Table 4.1. Hope scale findings

Hope Scale Findings												
Staff (S), Patron (P), or Volunteer (V)	P	P	V	V	P	V	V	V	S	V	S	V
1	6	8	1	6	8	6	8	5	8	8	7	8
2	6	7	7	6	8	7	8	5	8	8	8	7
3	8	5	7	8	1	3	4	3	4	4	6	6
4	1	8	7	3	8	7	8	5	8	5	7	8
5	1	1	2	2	1	5	7	7	2	8	4	7
6	6	8	6	7	8	7	8	5	8	8	6	8
7	5	5	2	2	1	1	2	5	3	5	6	7
8	6	8	7	7	8	5	8	6	8	8	7	8
9	3	8	7	6	8	7	8	8	8	5	8	8
10	6	7	2	7	8	7	6	8	6	2	8	8
11	7	4	2	7	1	1	8	2	2	8	1	7
12	5	7	2	5	8	7	8	5	6	5	1	7
Agency Score	20	29	18	24	32	28	30	26	28	20	25	30
Pathways Score	19	32	21	23	32	25	32	21	32	29	27	32
Composite Score	39	61	39	47	64	53	62	47	60	49	52	62
Detractors Score	21	15	13	19	4	10	21	17	11	25	17	27

Scores of 40-48 are hopeful, 48-56 are moderately hopeful, 56 or higher are high hope.

Survey Items:

	Hopeful	Moderately Hopeful	Highly Hopeful	Survey Item
Composite Score	2	2	3	1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
Agency Score	2, 9, 10, 12	1	2	2. I energetically pursue my goals.
Pathways Score	1, 4, 6, 8	1	2	3. I feel tired most of the time.
			3	4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
			4	5. I am easily downed in an argument.
			5	6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
			6	7. I worry about my health.
			7	8. Even when others get discouraged, I can think of many ways to solve the problem.
			8	9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
			9	10. I've been pretty successful in life.
			10	11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
			11	12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

	Average	Standard Deviation	Geometric Mean
Agency Score	25.83333	4.529365465	25.44174938
Pathways Score	27.08333	5.089353117	26.6193619
Composite Score	52.91667	8.928588745	52.19197385

Survey Response Scale:

1. Definitely False	3. Somewhat False	5. Slightly True	7. Mostly True	11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
2. Mostly False	4. Slightly False	6. Somewhat True	8. Definitely True	12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

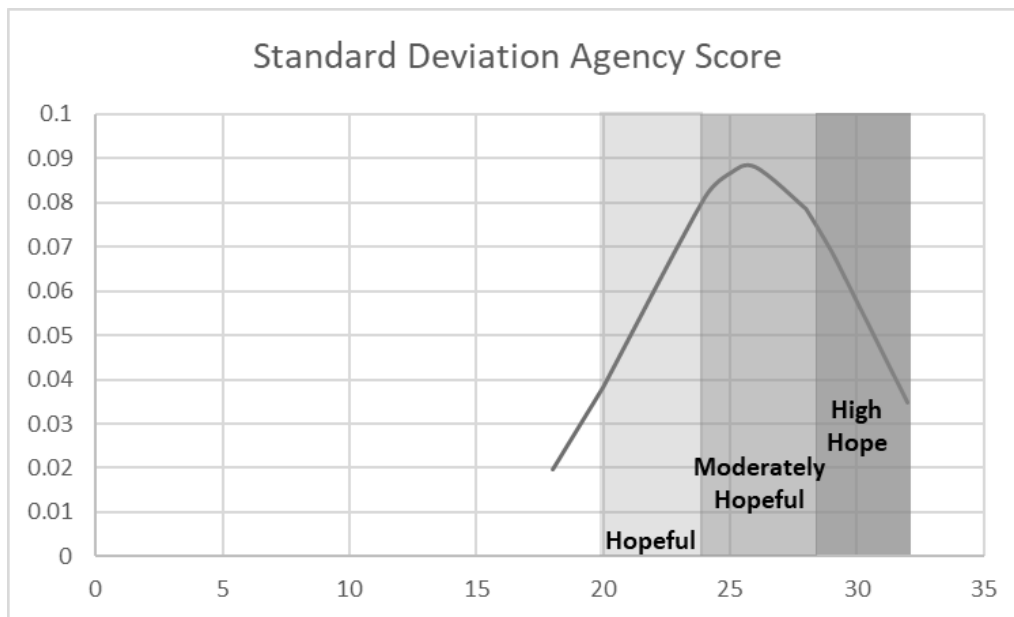


Figure 4.1. Standard deviation agency score

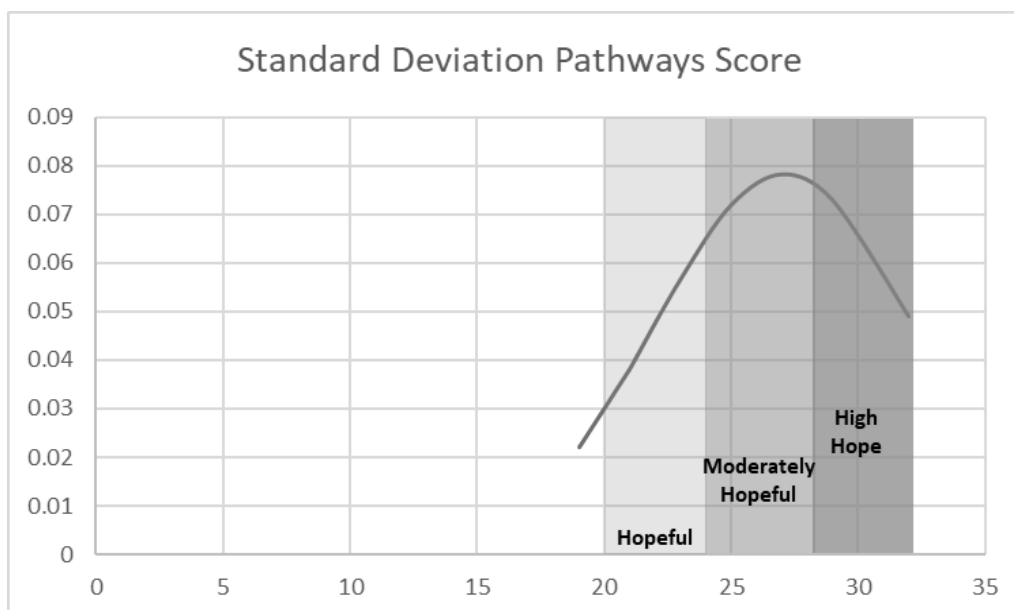


Figure 4.2. Standard deviation pathways score

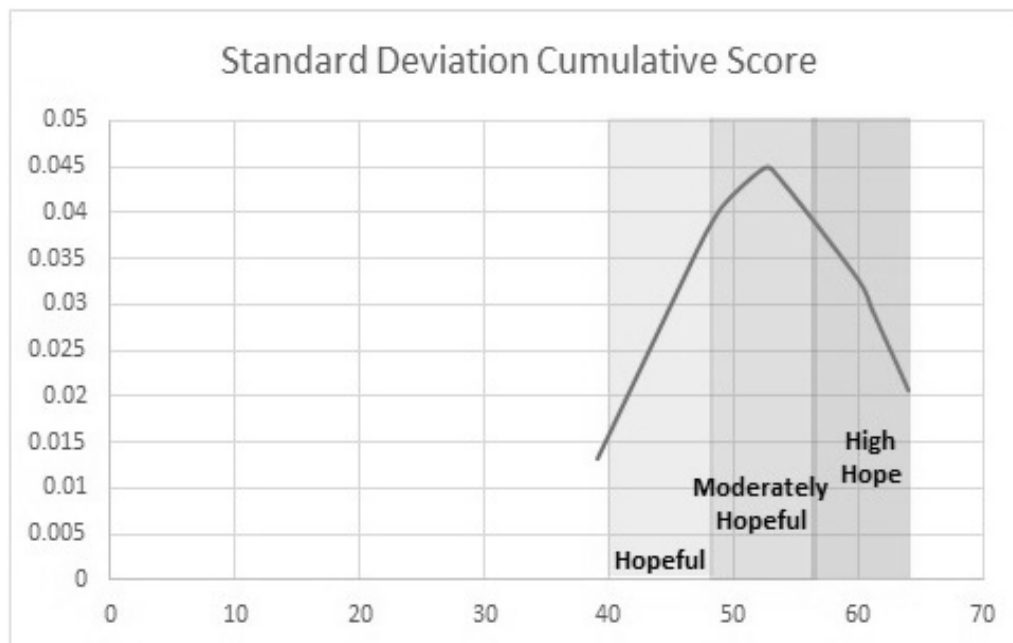


Figure 4.3. Standard deviation cumulative score

The survey of Hope Station workers and patrons using the Adult Hope Scale showed an elevated level of hope. The mean agency score was 25.8, the mean pathways score was 27.0, and the mean composite score was 52.9. These findings are significantly above the published norms.² The published norms for college and non-college participants are a mean composite score of 24 (on a maximum 32 scale), with much lower scores for those seeking psychiatric treatment. The Likert scale values for the Adult Hope Scale were doubled in 1993 to a maximum score of 64,³ presumably moving the average composite score to 48, still leaving the hope scale findings for Hope Station participants significantly above the published norms.⁴

² Lisa Edwards et al., "Understanding Hope: A Review of Measurement and Construct Validity Research" (2007), *College of Education Faculty Research and Publications*, 86.

³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

Interpretive Findings

The Hope Station findings are well above those reported by other researchers both before and after their efforts to increase hope among homeless women at a homeless shelter through Adventure Therapy.⁵ The Adventure Therapy intervention used a different mechanism to build hope, but the Hope Scale findings are comparable because the Adult Hope Scale was applied in a similar way, in a similar homeless population, and in a similar outreach setting. Yet the results are striking that the levels of hope are consistently much higher among Hope Station participants. The lack of before and after assessments leaves the question unanswered of how much and how quickly Hope Station's efforts are changing the level of hope over time. Yet, the consistently high levels of hope among Hope Station participants show that they present an elevated level of hope that is above what is expected in the normal population and that their continued influence in outreach should inspire higher levels of hope in others throughout the community.

Utility of the Hope Scale

One question that arises from the use of Snyder's Adult Hope Scale in this environment is how effectively the scale can be used to measure Christian Hope. The Adult Hope Scale is a secular clinical assessment tool that does not mention God or faith. These are major recurring themes in the participant interviews for Hope Station, but hope in God is not what the Adult Hope Scale measures. Though this widely used tool has been used by researchers to measure hope among Christian participants, the question items in the Adult Hope Scale center on

⁵ Christine L. Norton, "Utilizing Outdoor Adventure Therapy to Increase Hope and Well-Being among Women at a Homeless Shelter," *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership* 12, no. 1 (2020): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.18666/jorel-2020-v12-i1-9928>, 96.

individual confidence in their own abilities to achieve their personal life goals and their own resourcefulness in identifying viable pathways through which to pursue them. Researchers cited in the literature review above correlate some elements of hope with the agency of others and with external or societal pathways that spur the hopeful one toward success in achieving their goals. Indeed, the participation of others and external resources in the development of hope is evident and drives the pursuit of organizational and societal change toward ideas that foster an environment of hope. The elements that prop up hope are not understood to be centered solely on the hopeful one. External elements are relied upon to bolster their confidence and hope. So, though the Adult Hope Scale is a secular tool, it apparently succeeds in this study in measuring hope in individuals who rely upon external elements that are divine and faith-centered. The participants in this study exhibit a measurably high level of hope, while their interviews attribute their confidence to their experience of salvation and their faith in God rather than to their own abilities or resourcefulness. The tool, though secular, succeeds in this study in measuring the presence and magnitude of hope without needing to identify its origin or the pillars it rests upon. The researcher is compelled to ask if a broader application of the Adult Hope Scale across the Christian community might yield evidence of an elevated presence of hope among believers generally. This would evidence that the mere presence and function of initiatives like Hope Station within a community would engender hope regardless of the focus (whether temporal or eternal) by creating an environment where hopeful persons can interact in meaningful ways with hopeless ones, especially in ways that ameliorate or give meaning to their suffering.

Word Clouds

Textual analysis was initially approached using word clouds to identify recurring themes in participant responses to the interactive questionnaire. These illustrations help evaluators

that the participants most often mentioned references to God in their descriptions of Christian hope. Other dominant word occurrences are hope, give, plan, believing, better, Christians, and confident. There is a consensus of dominant themes between three separate word clouds that supports their accuracy.

Ability to Inspire Hope

Question 2 - How do you feel about Hope Station's ability to inspire hope in others?



Figure 4.5. Word cloud – the ability to inspire hope

In this word cloud, the dominant theme is, again, hope. Other frequent occurrences are inspire, good, and way. There is an emergence of hope-related ideas such as place, grow, inspire, focus, help, and difficulty.

Dealing with Hopelessness

Question 3 - How do you deal with hopelessness?



Figure 4.6. Word clouds - dealing with hopelessness

The overwhelmingly dominant theme in responses to this question is pray! Other dominant themes that are identified in the word clouds above are God's word, get help, try, never without hope, and help others.

Reasons Hope Station is not More Effective

Question 4 - What is the reason you feel Hope Station is not more successful in inspiring hope in others?



Figure 4.7. Word clouds - reasons for ineffectiveness

The clearly dominant theme in response to this question is that people and their needs are the primary reason Hope Station is not more successful. This came out in many ways through descriptive responses from staff, volunteers, and patrons. The intractable problems of homelessness are seen as challenging, both in the magnitude of the needs and the perceived inability to meet them all. Other dominant ideas were addictions, mental illness, and the lack of desire to change.

Core Themes in Participant Interviews

Descriptions of Hope

Hope Station participants presented many shared themes in their descriptions of hope. The following excerpts attempt to capture these themes in their own words:

“Hope is the ultimate human condition.” “It sees a better future—it is a vision to get better.” It is “believing in something better,” “hope for a better way.”

Hope is “essential—without it, we just die!” Hope has a “positive effect in our everyday life.” “It is a safety net ... having a security blanket.” “We will fall.” “Give out, but do not give up.” “It is a horrible feeling not to have hope.”

Hope is Jesus Christ. “Jesus is the Hope of the world,” it is “believing in Jesus Christ,” “to hope in Jesus.” It is “believing to see a better future through Jesus Christ” and “having a relationship with Jesus.” It is “being assured that God is your Savior” and “being assured that God’s got you.” It is “belief in God as the Agent of Hope,” “believing in his word and his statutes.”

Hope is “believing that people are born with a definite plan,” that the plan is “attainable and not just a dream,” and that God’s plan is a viable pathway to a better future. “It is hope (you) can understand” that “motivates people to take steps to make that future a reality.” “It makes people want to turn their life around.”

Hope is wrapped up in faith. “Faith creates confidence in what we hope for;” confidence “that God will take care of everything.” It is “faith in something bigger than ourselves.” It is “hope that everything will work out,” “that you do not have to worry about stuff.” It is “assurance that everything will be okay.”

Hope is not something people can do on their own. “Not all Christians have Christian hope.” But hope makes you an encourager believing “that there is hope in everybody if you can touch the right button.” “It just takes some of us a while to find it.” It is “helping get people to change their lives and Love the Lord.”

Hope Station participants have hope! One described it as “the ultimate human condition.” More than half of the participants referred to belief as an element of hope. They understand hope as more than mere optimism and show awareness of hope’s reliance upon agency and pathways.

One described God as “the Agent of hope with a viable (attainable) plan for a better future.” They described hope as belief in God (Jesus) as Savior for safety and a better future. Key ideas are that Christian hope can be understood, that God has a viable plan, and that everyone can have hope.

Ability to Inspire Hope

Three dominant themes emerged when participants were asked how they felt about Hope Station’s ability to inspire hope in others. These themes are presented below in a way that seeks to maintain the participants’ own words:

Some felt “good” saying “it is a good thing” and “a very effective tool.” “Incredible—you have tools, the Word, agencies to direct others to, food, showers, washer, dryer, the church.” “A complete circle.” “It has a good opportunity—the ability is there to do a lot to inspire hope in others.” “It is absolutely able to inspire hope and answer questions in a way people can understand.” One asked, “How else will they hear it?”

Some felt that it has potential: “We are growing in that direction.” “When you can get people there and still long enough to share the word with them you can get a seed planted. Then it’s what they do with it.” “God is showing us the way to inspire and help others.” “We are in a different season and time in which God may show us another avenue to inspire hope but for now we are in a good place.”

Some expressed concern: “Hope Station’s focus has been narrowly targeting the homeless population. Many among this population are unwilling to receive the message of hope but gladly receive the resources provided to maintain a life on the street. This issue causes the impact of Hope Station on inspiring hope to be minimal.” “People who are in very great difficulty have trouble seeing their way out and almost need someone there with them.” “It is a

very hard thing to do.” “The best way Hope Station is effective is one-on-one.” “Once they get turned around, they still need other Christians to help them grow.”

Dealing with Hopelessness

Some dominant themes emerged about dealing with hopelessness:

The first and clearly dominant response of most participants was to pray: “I pray.” “I have to turn to the Lord,” “feel God’s presence,” “know (God) will take care of it,” “know (God) will take care of me.” “Spending time with God,” “I pray,” “I pray about it,” “I pray,” or “pray!”

Some turn to the Bible: “Standing on His Word,” “sometimes reading the same scriptures over and over (Ps 91),” “fight it with God’s Word,” “relying on God’s Word for assurance and building me up in faith and His love for me.”

Some get alone to think: “Get alone and think about it,” “just being quiet and listening” and “I think about the situation and find other ways to deal with it.”

Some talk to others: “Talk to friends,” “Talk to my pastor and other Christians,” “Get help answering my questions,” and “Hopelessness is intensified by not understanding the problem, so I deal with it by asking questions and trying to better understand the problem.”

Others mentioned praising God, believing, and asking forgiveness: “Singing and praising.” “I believe there is a better day coming; if you put your hope in Jesus, it will be worth it all.” “If you’re saved, you have hope. If you’re lost, you have hope if you ask for forgiveness.”

Two said they never experience hopelessness: “Since I turned my life over to Jesus, I have not experienced hopelessness.” “I do not have hopelessness—never discouraged—sometimes disgusted or disappointed but never without hope.”

Many participants said that hopelessness inspires them to reach out to others: “Observing this state in others causes me to want everyone to know Jesus,” and “I seek to encourage others,

witness, and try to live a life that exemplifies Jesus.” “I seek ways to help others.” “Helping others also seems to help your problems seem less too,” and “I seek to love and help others.”

Reasons Hope Station is not More Effective

Finally, the project asked participants why they felt Hope Station is not more effective in inspiring hope in others. The following major themes emerged:

Mental illness and addictions. There is concern that the current focus on the chronically homeless limits Hope Station to working among a population that is “saturated with serious mental illnesses and addictions.” “To be more successful divine healing of mental illness and divine interventions to remove all addictions would be required or more licensed professional counselors would be needed.”

Manpower. Many participants shared concern about the need for more workers: “We do not have the manpower to reach everyone.” “It takes a lot of time and repetition, and we do not have a lot of people who can do that.” “(We) need to be staffed with more hours, have someone there more frequently.” “The congregation is small.”

Training. Many participants also shared concern that volunteers needed to be better trained: “... more licensed professional counselors would be needed” or “volunteers trained to deal with different personalities.” “Some people aren’t good at helping some of these people, and they can get angry.” “With proper training, I would be able to handle (people) better.”

Spiritual needs. Many expressed a need to focus more on spiritual issues: “To be more successful, divine healing of mental illness and divine interventions to remove all addiction would be required.” “They need to be spiritually fed but can only take a little John 3:16 each day.” “Hope Station should really just focus on spiritually ministering to them. It would limit the number of people but may result in more people turning their lives around.”

Readiness to hear the gospel. Many participants felt that the current focus is on individuals who have material needs but whose hearts are just not prepared to respond to the gospel message: “They do not want to be preached to but want help,” “they aren’t (here) looking for hope or for God.” “They are asking what’s in it for me and are not interested in learning about the gospel.” In times of struggle, getting angry at God, “in those times you aren’t thinking, you are just striking out at something.” “Some have been helped in ways with having material things taken care of and do not turn their life around and cannot maintain it and are back out on the street again.” “Some do not want responsibility but the freedom to do what they want.” “Even though some of them do want to change their lives, they’ve heard it before.” “They want to be understood and want you to agree with them.”

Need to focus elsewhere. Several felt that Hope Station’s focus is too narrow or is misplaced. They expressed concern about whether Hope Station is focusing on individuals who desire real change and about whether the people they are trying to reach really care or are just looking for a handout. They expressed a hesitant desire to be more selective with whom they help, not to be unloving but to be more effective. They expressed a desire to reach out to people who are sincerely trying to do better. One noted, “The congregation is small, and no one has focused on growing the size of the church.”

Other concerns. “Exposure—we have to get the word out there and let people know we are here to help with food, clothes, and what is needed to fill your soul.” “More time is needed to see things through.”

The research participants expressed overall concern that Hope Station needs to adjust its focus to pay more attention to spiritual needs. These concerns were more related to interest among patrons than hope among workers. They also seem to be more related to agency than

pathways. They were confident that viable pathways existed to escape homelessness and addiction but saw the need for greater human agency with more training and more workers and for greater divine agency with more divine intervention to create inner change and lasting hope in patrons. They sensed that Hope Station's current focus limits them in reaching others in the community who might be more receptive to the gospel. The researcher perceived that these concerns were not callous but were thoughtful responses that stemmed from their deep personal desires to be more effective in ministry.

Donut Charts

A more thorough analysis was needed so the textual analysis was performed again manually with careful categorization of participant responses. This categorization was then reviewed again to combine similar themes and narrow the number of categories. Donut charts were chosen to reflect the findings more accurately. Participant responses were manually reviewed, and similar themes were combined to narrow the number of categories. The donut charts were also formatted into multi-layer charts that better illustrate the corresponding values using width, length, and grayscale.

Participants were asked, "How would you describe Christian hope?" Their responses included forty-four statements describing hope that were categorized according to core themes and identified as representing agency or pathways thinking.

Descriptions of Hope

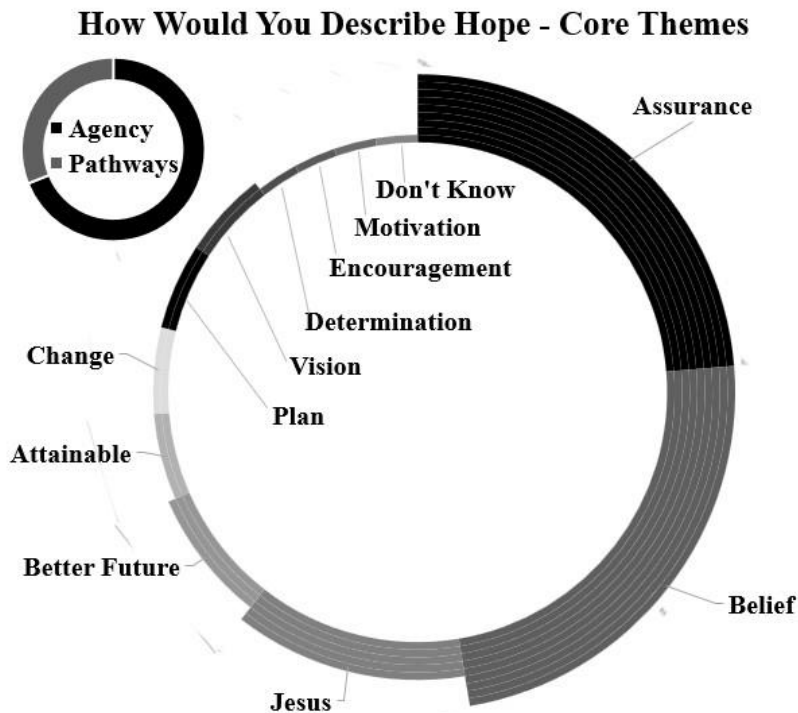


Figure 4.8. Donut chart - describing Christian hope

Below are sample statements from core themes that emerged when participants were asked, “How would you describe Christian hope?”

Assurance: “Hope is like having a security blanket, an assurance that everything will be okay.”

Belief: “Believing in God, that God is true, not a man-made god.”

Jesus: “Jesus is the Hope of the world.”

Better Future: “A better future, eternity can only be found through Jesus Christ. “

Attainable: “Something that is attainable and not a dream.”

Change: “If people want to turn their life around, they will have to have hope in Jesus.”

Plan: “I believe we are born into this world with a definite plan that God has for us.”

Vision: “A vision to get better.”

Determination: “I told my dad that I’m so tired I’m about to give out. He said, “Son, give out but do not give up.”“

Encouragement: “It makes you an encourager helping get people to change their lives and love the Lord.”

Motivation: “Hope is a powerful concept that causes a person to believe and see a better future and motivates them to take steps to make that future a reality.”

Do not Know: “I do not know how to describe it. I really haven’t thought about it.”

Ability to Inspire Hope

Hope Station's Ability to Inspire Hope - Core Themes



Figure 4.9. Donut chart – the ability to inspire hope

Below are sample statements from core themes that emerged when participants were asked, “How do you feel about Hope Station’s ability to inspire hope in others?”

Able: “Absolutely able to inspire hope and answer questions in a way I can understand.”

Growing: “We are growing in that direction and God is showing us the way to inspire and help others.”

Difficult: “It is a very hard thing to do.”

Requires Responsiveness: “Unfortunately, many among this population are unwilling to receive the message of hope”

Dependency: “Once they get turned around, they still need other Christians to help them grow.”

Narrow Focus: “Hope Stations’ focus has been narrowly targeting the homeless population.”

Minimal: “This issue causes the impact of Hope Station on inspiring hope to be minimal.”

Necessary: “It is a good thing. How else will they hear it?”

Dealing With Hopelessness

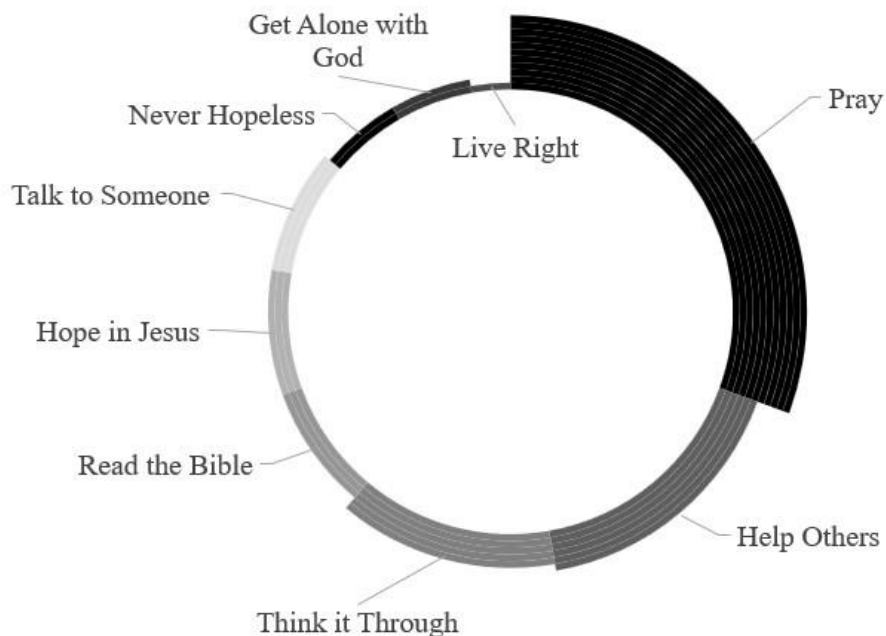
Dealing with Hopelessness Core Themes

Figure 4.10. Donut chart - dealing with hopelessness

Below are sample statements from core themes that emerged when participants were asked, “How do you deal with hopelessness?”

Pray: “I pray.”

Help Others: “Helping others also seems to help your problems seem less too.”

Think it Through: “Hopelessness is intensified by not understanding the problem, so I deal with it by asking questions and trying to better understand the problem.”

Read the Bible: “I fight it with God’s word, relying on God’s word for assurance and building me up in faith and his love for me.”

Hope in Jesus: “I believe there is a better day coming. If you put your hope in Jesus, it will be worth it all.”

Talk to Someone: “Talk to friends. Talk to my pastor and other Christians.”

Never Hopeless: “Since I turned my life over to Jesus, I have not experienced hopelessness.”

Get Alone with God: “I have to turn to the Lord, get alone and think about it and pray about it and feel God’s presence and know He will take care of it and take care of me.”

Live Right: “I pray, witness, try to live a live that exemplifies Jesus, seek ways to help others, and encourage others to love and help others.”

Reasons Hope Station is not More Effective

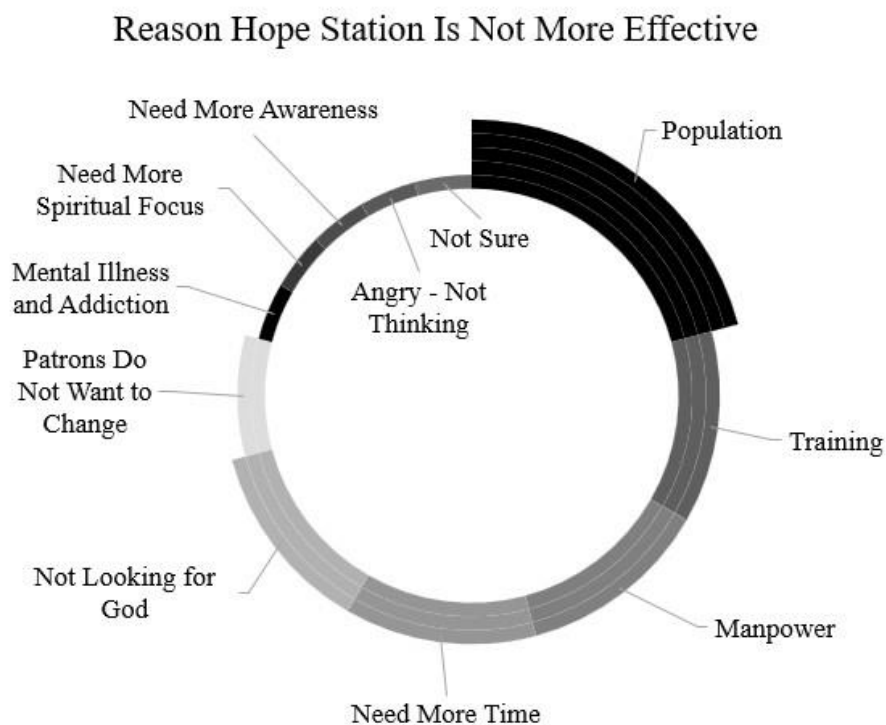


Figure 4.11. Donut chart - reasons for ineffectiveness

Below are sample statements from core themes that emerged when participants were asked, “What is the reason you feel Hope Station is not more successful in inspiring hope in others?”

Population: “I think it would be more successful if it had an outreach to people who are trying to do better.”

Training: “To be more successful, divine healing of mental illness and divine interventions to remove all addictions would be required, or more licensed professional counselors would be needed.”

Manpower: “It takes a lot of time and repetition, and we do not have a lot of people who can do that.”

Need More Time: The participant responses concerning the need for more time identified three different aspects in which more time is needed. “More time is needed to see things through.” “We need to be staffed with more hours, have someone there more frequently.” “They need to be spiritually fed but can only take a little John 3:16 each day.”

Not Looking for God: “Some people come to fill their bellies and get something for nothing—they aren’t looking for hope or for God.”

Patrons Do Not Want Change: “Some do not want responsibility but the freedom to do what they want.”

Mental Illness and Addictions “Unfortunately, this population is saturated with serious mental illnesses and addictions.”

Need More Spiritual Focus: “Hope Station should really just focus on spiritually ministering to them. It would limit the number of people but may result in more people turning their lives around.”

Need More Awareness: “Exposure—we have to get the word out there and let people know we are here to help with food, clothes, and what is needed to fill your soul.

Angry–Not Thinking: In times of struggle, getting angry at God, “in those times you aren’t thinking, you are just striking out at something.”

Not Sure: “I’m not sure.”

Interview Findings

Juxtaposed with concern about the lack of interest among the homeless population in making meaningful life changes, the hope level among Hope Station workers seems relatively high. They make strong statements of faith and hope in God and assert an absence of feelings of helplessness or hopelessness in their own lives. This confidence seems unshaken even when facing the intractable problems presented by homeless persons. Their own faith and confidence remain strong. There is a complete absence of statements of fear that these problems could or would extend to them personally or touch their own lives in harmful ways. They remain confident that God will provide for and protect them even as they labor among the suffering. Yet, there is an expression of disappointment in the fruit of their efforts, desiring a more receptive audience, and expressing two fears: one, that their efforts might be misplaced and might be more fruitful among a different population; and two, that the homeless population might be driving away others who might be more receptive to the gospel message. It would be easy to malign these sentiments as a desire for a simpler or more appealing ministry but there are no expressions in the participant interviews to support this. Rather, there is an expressed desire to reach the unloved and the outcast and help those suffering in every station in life.

The logical and most apparent conclusion is that there is a genuine desire to minister to those who are in need hampered by a genuine fear that the ones that Hope Station is focused on are not truly interested in amending their lives, only in ameliorating their suffering; that it is not sin that they despise, merely the consequences of it. It is a glaring contradiction with the

expressed values of Hope Station workers who are willing to suffer themselves and sacrifice their own time and energy to help others get free from sin. So, a hard question being asked by several volunteer workers is how can the church better identify those who are truly interested in changing their lives and (in a godly manner) be more selective with whom they help?

Unanticipated Changes in the Ministry Landscape

Some changes took place at CCOG and in the Melbourne area during this action research project that were beyond the scope of the project. The timing of these events enabled this study to observe these changes considering the project content and objectives. For instance, even while the above-stated questions were being posed by the study participants, changes to address them were already in play. The senior pastor resigned to move to a sports-centered ministry among school-aged children in another city, and a younger pastor was recruited who has a younger family and a focus on youth ministry.

Subsequently, the project was hampered by a local disaster in which a Category 5 hurricane struck Florida and did catastrophic damage to nearby communities. Volunteers from Hope Station, including the researcher, were dispatched to live temporarily in the affected area and provide disaster assistance. These efforts included receiving, sorting, and warehousing bulk donations, preparing and delivering relief supplies, providing rescue and medical assistance, feeding and sheltering volunteers, and performing tree and debris removal, roof repairs, and other immediate assistance. Volunteers and ministers also prayed with, encouraged, and counseled disaster victims.

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, concerns emerged about safety, regard for the sanctity of the church facility, and CCOG becoming a “homeless hotspot” and alienating individuals who may be more receptive to the gospel message. These concerns were met with decisions to move

outreach activities geared toward ministering to the homeless off-site and away from the church facility and eventually to (within a few months) shutter Hope Station's onsite outreach center.

The decision was also made to rescind permission for two ministry groups that were allowed to host feeding and homeless ministry on the CCOG campus, and that no more mass feeding events be held on-site. These decisions were also partly in response to two altercations that took place at these activities on the church property while key Hope Station workers were away providing hurricane relief.

Some background information is in order here:

His Place, a downtown church in Melbourne, ran a homeless ministry providing meals, clothing, and emergency shelter for homeless persons for over twenty-five years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they decided to end their on-site homeless ministry. As noted above, Melbourne has a local ordinance that forbids mass feedings in public areas without a permit. Permits may be issued only to a single agency a limited number of times per year, and fees run hundreds of dollars, making this an unattractive or unfeasible alternative.

One ministry group from a Hispanic church in a nearby city began providing meals at a local Hispanic church in downtown Melbourne. The owner of the property eventually asked them to stop because of problems stemming from the presence of large numbers of homeless persons. CCOG agreed to allow them to use their fellowship hall on Tuesday evenings.

Another local couple and their friends began preparing meals in their homes and delivering them to the homeless. They were given permission to provide meals in the CCOG parking lot on Monday nights. CCOG rescinded permission for both groups.

Another local change is the decision by the Melbourne City Council to eventually shutter Daily Bread, a local food bank that provides meals, clothing, showers, housing assistance, and

case management to homeless persons in Melbourne, Florida. That council voted, instead, to use COVID-19 funds to build an affordable housing area adjacent to a closing landfill on the north side of town. This decision will shift resources away from Daily Bread to focus on providing affordable housing.

The city also decided to stipulate in the land use agreement that no on-site homeless services may be provided in the new location. Coupled with the above ministry changes at CCOG, the result is that no more mass meals or onsite homeless services will be available in the downtown Melbourne area.

Concerns about being more selective (in a godly way) with whom CCOG ministers to and tries to help were met with a renewed focus on family and youth ministry and with the hiring of new staff to better target those populations through social media, music, and children's ministry. With the arrival of new staff to help in these areas, the former outreach pastor, this researcher, and his wife, the former worship leader, each resigned their posts amicably seeking to focus on other areas of ministry.

CCOG has witnessed a gradual rise in attendance of some former members bolstered by the arrival of some new members and the visiting of friends or family members of the new ministry staff. There has also been a reduction in occasional attendance by homeless persons. Hope Station continued to operate a food pantry in the new outreach center and shuttered it for good in October of 2023. There are ongoing physical renovations of the church facility with the hope that these changes will shift the ministry of CCOG toward a more receptive population and position CCOG to better serve other elements of the surrounding community.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to disciple Hope Station workers to provide service that focuses on instilling hope in Christ. The researcher seeks to correct what he perceives as a shift in focus away from evangelism and toward community service. He believes this shift was caused by Hope Station's efforts to mitigate the desperate needs of those patrons who come for help. Their needs are often intractable and existential. The immediacy of the crisis and the need for tangible intervention tend to focus workers on providing food, clothing, and other material support. Deeper issues that drive addiction, homelessness, helplessness, and hopelessness are often left to the attention of pastoral staff.

The researcher conducted purposive interviews to evaluate and better understand the views of Hope Station workers and patrons and to explore ways to sharpen their focus on instilling hope in Jesus. He measured the levels of hope among project participants and explored their concepts of the Christian nature of hope. He sought to help them better understand and articulate Christian hope, and to improve their ability to share that hope with others.

The project centers on interviews and hope level assessments. The interviews are designed to prompt free discussion and to invite participants to share their understanding of Christian hope. They also solicit feedback on their views of how well Hope Station inspires hope in the community and how it can do so more effectively. The Adult Hope Scale is used to evaluate hope levels among participants. The researcher anticipated that participants would have difficulty articulating the need for, nature of, and source of their hope. He also expected their

hope levels would initially be low, and that they would improve over time. Instead, hope levels were higher than expected at the outset. The participant interviews expressed an unexpected resilience of hope among workers. They also provided meaningful feedback about the nature of their hope and their difficulty sharing it with others who do not share the values that undergird their hope.

Initial Results

The project findings showed a high level of hope among study participants indicating that the initial assumptions of the presence of hopelessness among Hope Station workers were incorrect. The initial objectives of this action research project sought to measure and find ways to improve the level of hope among Hope Station workers and collaterally improve their ability to convey that hope to others, especially in the scope of their involvement with the ministry of Hope Station. These initial objectives were hampered by an epidemic, a natural disaster, by social and church issues, leadership changes, and corrective actions that shifted the ministry of CCOG away from a targeted ministry to the homeless and away from an onsite outreach and relief ministry at Hope Station. Yet, the research identified a prevailing confidence in God that underpins the persistent hope of the study participants.

There is much evidence of divine agency as a key component of Christian hope in the participant interview. It is clear that the elevated levels of hope do not stem from their own sense of achievement or personal agency, nor from any confidence in their own ingenuity or ability, to find successful pathways. There is a clear resounding hope in God, in His good will toward them, confidence in His willingness and ability to help, and assurance of His ability to guide them along successful pathways. When facing hopelessness, they seek Him directly through

prayer, solitude, reflection, and study of the Bible and indirectly counsel with pastors or other believers. He is their clear source of hope and their sure remedy for hopelessness.

These findings form an unforeseen challenge to the elements of agency thinking in Snyder when contrasted with God-centered Christian hope. Snyder's concepts of agency center primarily on human agency in the hopeful one or other human agents who work to improve his or her condition. Agency thinking must include recognition of divine agency and intervention in the formation of Christian hope.

Findings in Light of Theological Framework

The theological framework above sets forth the idea that Christian hope is firmly grounded in Jesus Christ, not just His historic accomplishments, but in His present redemptive work. Christian hope is an expression of confidence in God's divine agency to personally and definitively act on behalf of believers to move them toward a better state of existence. This personal work is carried out through God's eternal work to unite everyone and everything in heaven and in earth into one in Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is personally active in this eternal work that was planned and put into action before the foundation of the world and will continue until each believer is made into the image and likeness of Christ to be joint heirs and coregents with Him over all of creation. God, not willing that any should perish, makes this redemption confidently available to every person. This confidence is readily and freely expressed by the workers and volunteers at Hope Station, who clearly identify Jesus as the source and basis for their hope. This hope is not just an abstract attribution to a historical figure, but is based on their personal experience in His ongoing and personal redemptive work in their lives. They describe Hope as Jesus Christ, that He is the Hope of the world, and that hope is "believing to see a better future through Jesus Christ" and having a personal relationship with Him. They describe hope as

the assurance that God is your Savior, and that assurance is anchored in their personal experience with Jesus. One candid and unprompted worker described hope as “belief in God as the Agent of Hope.” Two participants stated separately that they have not experienced hopelessness at all themselves since placing their trust in Jesus.

The theological framework above presents a scriptural premise that God’s plan for redemption gives hope to individuals. Hope Station workers described hope as “believing that people are born with a definite plan,” that God’s plan is “attainable and not just a dream,” and that it provides a viable pathway to a better future. They said this plan and hope is understandable, “motivates people to take steps to make that future a reality,” and “makes people want to turn their life around.”

The theological framework also shows that hope is anchored in faith and that to be without faith is to be without Christian hope. Hope station workers stated that “faith creates confidence in what believers hope for,” knowing “that God will take care of everything.” They describe hope as “faith in something bigger than ourselves.”

Hope is not something people can do on their own. “Not all Christians have Christian hope.” But hope makes you an encourager believing “that there is hope in everybody if you can touch the right button.” “It just takes some of us a while to find it.” It is “helping get people to change their lives and Love the Lord.” Without any prompting from the researcher, the participants in this action research project identified many of the dominant themes laid out in the theological framework above as being central to their own personal experience in Christian hope.

Findings in Light of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework above provides a scriptural portrait of hope that agrees with secular concepts of hope. This framework differentiates hope from mere optimism by the

participation of an agent working along a viable pathway to achieve a better state of existence. Hope Station workers define hope within such a context, and it was evidenced in the experiences of the survivors of Hurricane Ian. Their hope is not an abstract general optimism but a confidence in the personal agency of Jesus Christ to move them along a viable pathway of God's eternal redemptive plan. That work is not merely to achieve a better state in the by-and-by but is a present experience of an ongoing improvement in their current state of existence that is moving them toward a realized hope in a better temporal and eternal state. It is just as real as any temporal hopes placed in others whether they are friends, family, community leaders, or politicians whose positive agency works to move them toward a better state of existence. It also fuels their own personal action toward achieving their temporal and eternal goals. The attributes of their hope satisfy both the sacred and secular tenets of hope described in the theoretical framework above.

Hope Station workers and Hurricane Ian survivors found human agency to be a key component of their own hope and their efforts to inspire hope in others. The work at Hope Station to aid individuals experiencing addiction and homelessness mirrors the agency of Pastor Rebecca Strong's church members whose ministry to the homeless seeks to reduce the intractable vulnerability of homelessness.¹ The human agency of ministers and rescue workers on Pine Island to listen, pray, provide comfort, and reduce suffering mirrored the hope-mediating ministry of other religious leaders worldwide to mitigate the suffering and improve the state of existence of the victims and survivors of natural disasters.²

¹ Moxley, "I Don't Have a Home, 437.

² Hirono and Blake, "The Role of Religious Leaders," 1.

One Hope Station worker explained that the individuals they minister to “do not want to be preached to but want help, even though some of them do want to change their lives.” They echo Dr. Moxley’s assertion that, in their work for others, helpers themselves find grace and redemption.³ One worker stated that “helping others also seems to help your problems seem less too.” Another said, “Since I turned my life over to Jesus, I have not experienced hopelessness. Observing this state in others causes me to want everyone to know Jesus. Therefore, I pray, witness, try to live a life that exemplifies Jesus, seek ways to help others, and encourage others to love and help others.” Another worker said, “Helping others also seems to help your problems seem less too.” Moxley defines these human works as the personal agency of both the giver and the recipient.

The theoretical framework above describes hope as critical. Drs. Tom and Bev Rodgers assert that people seek counseling because they do not have hope⁴ and that hope builds resilience, which “helps people bounce back from adversity and deal with wounds from their past.”⁵ Hope Station workers also find hope to be essential. One said, “I know what it is to feel hopeless. Hope is like having a security blanket, an assurance that everything will be okay. It is a horrible feeling not to have it.” Another described hope as “faith in something bigger than ourselves to give us hope for a better way—so essential. Without it, we just die!”

In the theoretical framework, researchers and authors present a chorus of testimony that identifies human agency as a driving force of hope for change. This researcher argues further that Christian hope relies upon divine agency. Hope station workers present a chorus of testimony

³ Hirono and Blake, “The Role of Religious Leaders,” 445.

⁴ Timothy E. Clinton and Ronald E. Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 154.

⁵ Clinton and Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, 155.

that describes human agency in Christian hope as driven by divine agency. One said, “Jesus is the Hope of the world. Hope is a powerful concept that causes a person to believe and see a better future and motivates them to take steps to make that future a reality. In other words, our faith creates confidence in what we hope for.” Another said, “If people want to turn their lives around, they will have to have hope in Jesus. It is not something we can do on our own.” One described hope as “being assured that God’s got you—a safety net—we will fall, but knowing that God is your savior gives hope that everything will work out to His glory.”

Findings in Light of Precedent Literature

The precedent literature shows that scholars and theologians find hope to be essential but admit to difficulty in defining exactly what hope is and articulating the nature of hope. They define it as a positive life force, belief, or feeling that a better life is possible. They identify characteristics of hope that differentiate it from optimism, namely the participation of an agent to bring about positive change and a viable pathway along which beneficial change can be achieved. This is like describing the color of an automobile and the need for a driver and a road to move it along. While helpful, these particulars do not define what an automobile is. The same could be said of a horse, a tractor, or a tugboat. The participants in this action research project, however, had no difficulty describing in a commonsense vernacular the nature and source of their Christian hope. Their responses were not echoes of religious mantras but were very personal and revealing descriptions of their personal experiences. Their hope is the person, Jesus Christ, “the hope of the world,” who enables them to “believe and see a better future and motivates them to take steps to make that future a reality.” This hope is borne out of a personal relationship with Jesus and rests upon “a definite plan that God has for us.” It is a reliance upon and confidence in God that “has a positive effect in your everyday life,” “makes you an

encourager,” and inspires believers to move forward with an assurance that “God’s got you” and “everything will be okay,” even in the knowledge that they cannot achieve a better state on their own.

Their definition rests naturally upon the vital elements that, according to scholars, differentiate hope from optimism. It also includes the seven “hope-fostering” characteristics identified by Kaye Herth: interpersonal connectedness, attainable goals, spiritual base, personal attributes, lightheartedness, uplifting memories, and affirmation of worth.⁶ It manifests a positive expectancy based on the “religious correlations” that, according to Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, undergird hope and optimism.⁷

Research Implications

The implications of this action research project in the context of the ministry of Hope Station suggest that the ministry does not suffer from a lack of hope among workers. The hope levels were higher than expected and the workers are articulate in describing hope and the basis for their hope in a way that differentiates it from mere optimism. The focus of Hope Station on providing immediate, tangible relief is borne of the exigent and existential circumstances faced by the patrons who come seeking help. The demands these needs press upon the volunteers and limited resources leave little time or means to deal in a meaningful way with deeper issues that drive helplessness, hopelessness, addiction, and homelessness. This is hampered by the disinterest of a majority of patrons in the values and beliefs that undergird the hope being presented by the workers. Workers have lamented this disinterest and express a shared desire to

⁶ Jack Coulehan, “Suffering, Hope, and Healing,” in *Handbook of Pain and Palliative Care: Biopsychosocial and Environmental Approaches for the Life Course*, ed. Rhonda J. Moore (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 739–53, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95369-4_35, 746–47.

⁷ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 2.

find ways to focus their efforts and resources on individuals who are more open to the gospel message. They describe the population being served as “long-time career homeless” and as “saturated with serious mental illness and addictions” who have accepted homelessness and addiction as their way of life. They point to a lack of manpower and the need for “a lot of time and repetition” from “people talented to do that.” They share concerns about patrons becoming angry and only desiring what is necessary to continue their lives out on the street. Many expressed the desire to be more selective and focus their efforts on individuals who truly desire lasting change.

One participant said that “to be more successful divine healing of mental illness and divine interventions to remove all addictions would be required or more licensed professional counselors would be needed.” Yet, Hope Station workers create an environment in which hope thrives in simple daily experiences in a way that promotes overall mental health and helps mitigate specific conditions of mental illness including hopelessness, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and trauma-related disorders⁸ that stem from homelessness and addiction. The concerns expressed by Hope Station workers imply a need to reassess the methods being employed, the resources available, the need for more professional ministers and counselors, and the receptiveness of the targeted population if Hope Station or similar community outreach ministries are to more effectively convey hope in this ministry context. Otherwise, the resources and volunteers should be employed in a different ministry context pursuing ministry goals that can more selectively target individuals who are more open to the gospel message that undergirds the hope that drives the ministry forward.

⁸ Wydick, Dowd, and Lybbert, “Exploring Religious Belief, Hope, and Transition out of Poverty,” 2.

Research Applications

This action research project demonstrates that the Adult Hope Scale is an effective tool for assessing Christian hope in the ministry context of Hope Station and other similar outreach ministries. It also shows that timely interviews can identify the beliefs held by workers, volunteers, and patrons and provide a means for assessing the coherence of these beliefs with the goals of the ministry. It can also be used to solicit meaningful feedback from stakeholders about their views of the efficacy of the ministry and barriers that may be inhibiting the effectual work of the ministry. It shows, too, that a meaningful exchange between sacred and secular scholarship can help provide a more thorough understanding of hope, the human experience, ministry contexts, and effective methods for conveying and building hope in the community. It also demonstrates a need for smaller ministries to partner with professional and community workers and resources to minister more effectively to intractable and existential problems.

Research Limitation

The scope of this action research project was appropriate for the stated goals but the implementation in the original plan was hampered by both expected and unexpected limitations. The most significant expected limitation was the exigent circumstances and transience of patrons that hampered their ability to participate more fully in the project. The study was also significantly inhibited by the assumptions and predispositions of the researcher about the nature of the problem being investigated. The most significant unanticipated limitations were the disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ian. Each of these limitations contributed to the need to restructure the focus of the project toward identifying a scholarly and theologically sound definition of Christian hope, applying that understanding to assess levels and concepts of hope within the context of the ministry of Hope Station, and identifying barriers that

Hope Station workers face in building hope among individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction within the community. The project failed to develop tools to build hope among Hope Station workers, to apply those tools, and to evaluate any beneficial change they would have brought. While the two natural disasters seemed to hinder the original design of the project, they each created an environment where Christian hope shined and bolstered the ability of the researcher to observe hope in action. The project successfully demonstrated an elevated level of hope among Hope Station workers, identified the coherence of their shared views to the understanding of the nature and definition of Christian hope, and defined barriers perceived by workers in their ministry to build hope in the community.

Implications for Further Research

This action research project failed to gather information from members of Cornerstone Church of God, the surrounding community, and the surrounding homeless population to compare hope levels in individuals who are not active in the ministry of Hope Station. This would be beneficial in a future study to evaluate the efficacy of hope-building efforts at Hope Station and similar ministries. It could better establish local norms of community hope levels for comparison. It may also help identify beneficial changes that are not attributable to Hope Station's ministry such as those boosted by other community initiatives and could help Hope Station better refine its outreach focus.

This action research project raises the question of whether agency needs a modified definition in Christian hope when coupled with divine Agency and promises of divine aid. Do Christians exhibit higher levels of hope thought across the population? Indeed, Snyder himself avers that positive (hopeful) dispositions stem from perceptions that individual goals are

achievable and are bolstered by former successes in overcoming barriers.⁹ These perceptions may exist in the absence of promises of help or deliverance from obstacles but most certainly would be strengthened by them if those promises are believed by the hopeful one. Hopeful anticipation surrounding these kinds of promises and their veracity is energetically reinforced within Christian communities as in a sermon series on hope offered at Broadway Community Church in the weeks just before Hurricane Ian. Snyder posits various combinations of high agency thinking versus low agency thinking combining with high or low pathways thinking and the effect it has upon the presence of hope. These ideas are not new. Solomon bemoaned what Snyder identifies as high agency and low pathways thinking in his observation that, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Prov 13:12, NKJV). Christians find hope for success in Paul’s statement that, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13, NKJV). These questions and their significance to pastoral and other types of counseling merit further research.

Gaps still exist in building hope in a meaningful way among individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction. This effort may benefit from researchers exploring ways to better identify individuals who are open to meaningful change and to motivate those who are not. They can explore ways for churches to clarify their ministry context, target population, and ministry goals. They can also research ways hope is perceived by those struggling with homelessness and addiction and develop tools to build hope without creating detachment or disillusionment among them and the workers who set out to help them.

Individual and collective beliefs and experiences reinforce levels of fear and hope throughout the community. Researchers may benefit communities by helping them to identify factors that undergird deeply held beliefs. Further research may help communities and ministries

⁹ Snyder, *Rainbows in the Mind*, 252–53.

develop specific approaches and tools to address intractable issues of homelessness and addiction such as poverty and discrimination.

Unforeseen Outcomes

This study was interrupted by the disastrous impact of Hurricane Ian on the Gulf Coast of Florida as Hope Station workers responded to provide rescue and material assistance and spiritual support to disaster victims. Hope and despair were intertwined and the barriers to disaster victims were both material and spiritual. The impact was both temporal and eternal on victims, survivors, and relief workers. In fact, the disaster happened during a season in which Pastor Chuck Smith of Broadway Community Church, one of the primary relief stations in Fort Myers, was in the midst of a series of sermons on hope. His congregation had experienced disasters before, and they were undaunted in their hope and determination to help those around them. This church serving as a relief hub is a Christian community built upon Christian hopes. They labored daily and tirelessly by ministering to the needs of the disaster victims in Fort Myers and on Pine Island and other barrier islands that suffered catastrophic damage.

This researcher found on his arrival at Pine Island faces of despair and hopelessness as storm victims faced the obstacles of returning to their homes, finding their loved ones, and rebuilding their lives. Many had lost everything, having been injured themselves, having lost loved ones, and having their homes and livelihoods completely destroyed. Yet a stream of dauntless workers carrying supplies and hope helped them begin to rebuild. On his arrival, this researcher found defeat and despair with survivors asking, “Where can we even begin? We’ve lost everything.” There was an amazing shift in sentiment during the initial weeks of recovery as people began to discover hope. The attitude shifted to a deeply grateful determination as the survivors began to ask, “What shall we build now?” Helplessness turned to hopefulness.

The hope that emerged was bolstered by outside help and confidence not only in human agency but in divine purpose and aid. Countless individuals gave testimonies and personal stories that attributed their survival, rescue, and recovery to divine agency. It is no surprise that many of the relief workers were Christians and Christian hope abounded. It was Christian hope in action as Hope Station workers labored alongside other believers and relief organizations to rebuild hope within the stricken areas. The efficacy of that hope and the ability of Hope Station workers to convey it to others was brazenly apparent.

One of the most astounding observations was the prevailing propensity of victims, many of whom had lost everything themselves, to decline assistance, thinking others were suffering more than they were. There was a consistent goodwill toward neighbors with many asking for prayer and help for others. There was also a consistent acknowledgment of God's goodness and an open gratitude for being alive.

These observations lend credibility to the participant interview responses that find that Hope Station's effectiveness in its mission to inspire hope in Jesus may be hampered by a lack of interest in change among patrons. Though the circumstances differ starkly, the struggles faced by chronically homeless, mentally ill, and addicted persons are as existentially significant as those faced by the hurricane survivors who have been rendered helpless by the loss of their loved ones, homes, and livelihoods. What was evident was a difference in their disposition toward recovery. Hope Station workers find that many of the homeless and addicted patrons desire only to gain some material relief that ameliorates their struggle while enabling them to continue to live in their present condition or with their present life choices. The hurricane victims that Hope Station volunteers encountered were desperate to recover and applied themselves diligently to that end. Hope Station workers witnessed selfish excesses in each environment where individuals sought

to gain some personal advantage by taking more than they needed. But, while the general disposition of the homeless was to maintain their status quo, the hurricane victims diligently applied themselves to their recovery. There are frequent expressions of interest in recovery among the chronically homeless and addicted encountered by Hope Station workers, but these expressions are seldom accompanied by a level of interest in amending their lives that leads to any diligent activity toward real and lasting change. Some of the hurricane victims admitted to living sinful lives, but their interest was in recovering from their catastrophe, not finding a means to survive within it. A sense of helplessness abounded in each condition and was addressed by the efforts of relief workers. Yet, the experience of helplessness was far more temporary and there was a significantly greater movement toward recovery among the hurricane victims, even though suffering was more widespread and public resources were damaged, more severely taxed, or altogether destroyed and non-existent.

The significant difference between the outcomes was apparently driven by differing motivations toward change, not by the viability of pathways to recovery or the availability of interested agents of change. It is possible that individuals facing homelessness have exhausted their support systems and this may contribute to the intractable nature of their struggle. It is possible, too, that although many public service systems are broken in disaster areas, the influx of resources from federal and local governments, churches, and volunteer organizations significantly enhances the chances of recovery. Yet, many of these same resources are projected in different ways to address homelessness and do so in an environment that is not suffering the effects of a natural disaster. In each case, there was real hope for recovery that was seized upon by one group of individuals and passed over by the other.

These differing experiences reveal that there truly is no lasting hope without repentance. Lasting hope rests upon change that leads to an improvement of life, whether temporal or eternal. Otherwise, the effect of relief is short-lived, and the person returns to their former condition or even to something worse (Prov 26:11; 2 Pet 2:19b–22).

Recommendations

Hold fast to that which is good (1Thes 5:21) but do not stop asking how to do better. This action research project finds evidence of prevailing Christian hope in Jesus Christ among Hope Station volunteers and staff. This evident hope in the midst of suffocating hopelessness among Hope Station patrons implies a need to ask other questions about how to better convey that hope to others. Since hope is found in Christ, how could CCOG and Hope Station workers get people more interested in the gospel itself? How can Hope Station better help those around them overcome addiction and homelessness? How can Hope Station staff and volunteers better present their testimony within their ministry context?

Clarify hope. Hope remains an obscure and abstract idea that is poorly defined. Christians participating in this study expressed a firm hope grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ. Christians must find more effective ways of describing what hope is. Christian theologians, scholars, and researchers must offer scholarly definitions of hope, not only to answer secular definitions but to combine contemporary learning with sound exegesis that recognizes the influence of divine agency and pathways. They must offer definitions that Christians can agree on. This researcher once discussed hope with an elderly Catholic friend who sincerely asked, “What is hope?” He contrasted it with dread, waiting for something good to happen rather than something evil. Yet, this definition is hollow. Hope is more than that—more than optimism. Christians must extend to the world a clear definition of hope and their reasons for embracing it.

Stay Focused. Christian outreach ministries must focus on individuals who want change. There must be more than a desire for a better circumstance. They must be willing to walk the pathway to change and to do the hard work of changing themselves, their habits, lifestyles, and life choices. It may also include the hard work of facing and working through the consequences of past circumstances and choices. Many of the chronically homeless and addicted individuals encountered by Hope Station workers were truly mentally ill. Many others merely desired the amelioration of their condition without any modification of the life choices that contribute to their suffering. Many of them died while many more remained in their desperate condition. Too many of these individuals are seeking relief, not transformation.

The church must not be co-opted into becoming a relief organization but must stay focused on the Great Commission, the ministry of reconciliation, instruction, correction, and ministry to the saints. Christians, like the ones participating in this study, not only present an object of hope to the world, but they express an elevated level of hope within the community that should contagiously inspire hope in others. While Christian labor in this present world has eternal value in God's new world to come, the church is still faced with the challenge of the workers at Hope Station: How can the church better identify those who are truly interested in changing their lives and (in a godly manner) be more selective with whom they help?

The Last Word

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58, KJV). “Hope liberates people ... It enables them to imagine a future that is different from the

past and present and motivates them to change their situation...¹⁰ Those who have labored at Hope Station and similar Christian outreach ministries to aid those struggling with homelessness and addiction have not labored in vain (see also Heb 6:10).

Your testimony matters! It can provide encouragement and hope to those who are still in the struggle. The light of your testimony could be the glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel for someone else ... the personal account of someone who has faced and overcome the struggle ... the acknowledgment that their struggle matters, that they matter... the assurance that they are not in the battle alone and that others are willing to help.

How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good *things*,
Who says to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”

Isa 52:7 (NKJV)

How then shall they call on Him in whom
they have not believed? And how shall they
believe in Him of whom they have not
heard? And how shall they hear without a
preacher? And how shall they preach unless
they are sent? As it is written:

“How beautiful are the feet of those who
preach the gospel of peace,

Who bring glad tidings of good things!”

Rom 10:14-15 (NKJV)

Those who have overcome homelessness, addiction, imprisonment, and hopelessness continue to give courage to those who are still in the struggle... and hope.

¹⁰ Eran Halperin et al., “Emotions in Conflict,” 253–54.

Appendix A**INITIAL INTERVIEW**

- 1. PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.**

- 2. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HOPE?**

- 3. ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?**

- 4. WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO HOPE STATION?**

- 5. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH HOPE STATION?**

- 6. ARE TO WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT?**

Explain the purpose of the project:

The purpose of the study is to build understanding of the true nature of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons. It will then seek to help Hope Station provide food, clothing, and other needed services with a greater focus on building true and lasting hope in Jesus Christ. The study will attempt to measure any meaningful change in the presence of hope among Hope Station patrons and workers.

Are you willing to participate? Yes / No

Appendix B**INTERACTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE**

- 1. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE CHRISTIAN HOPE?**

- 2. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT HOPE STATION'S ABILITY TO INSPIRE HOPE IN OTHERS?**

- 3. HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH HOPELESSNESS?**

- 4. WHAT IS THE REASON YOU FEEL HOPE STATION IS NOT MORE SUCCESSFUL IN INSPIRING HOPE IN OTHERS?**

The purpose of this interactive questionnaire is to help participants express their own ideas about hope and prompt them to assess how hope relates to the ministry of Hope Station.

Appendix C

Date
Privileged Data
Senior Pastor
Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne
311 E. Hibiscus Blvd.
Melbourne, FL 32901

Dear Pastor Broom,

As a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Building Hope in Outreach Ministry. The purpose of my research is to build understanding of the true nature of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Hope Station Outreach Ministry of Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne and to contact Hope Station workers and patrons to invite them to participate in my research study.

Prospective participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants in the study will be asked to attend or participate in:

- 2 surveys (5 minutes each)
- 1 interview (15 minutes)
- 3 teaching sessions (30 minutes each)
- 3 individual or group discussions (up to one hour each)
- 1 outreach event (one to four hours)

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, a permission letter is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Preston W. Boerner
Outreach Pastor

Appendix D

Date

Preston W. Boerner
Outreach Pastor
Hope Station Outreach Ministry
Cornerstone Church of God
Melbourne Florida, 32901

Dear Pastor Preston:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Building Hope in Outreach Ministry, I/we have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at Hope Station Outreach Ministry of Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I/We grant permission for Preston Boerner to contact Hope Station workers and patrons to invite them to participate in his research study.

I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Bishop Larry Dale Broom
Senior Pastor
Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne

Appendix E

Adult Hope Scale¹

Rate each statement with one of the numbered responses below:

- 1 = Definitely False
- 2 = Mostly False
- 3 = Somewhat False
- 4 = Slightly False
- 5 = Slightly True
- 6 = Somewhat True
- 7 = Mostly True
- 8 = Definitely True

- _____ 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- _____ 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
- _____ 3. I feel tired most of the time.
- _____ 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
- _____ 5. I am easily downed in an argument.
- _____ 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
- _____ 7. I worry about my health.
- _____ 8. Even when others get discouraged, I can think of many ways to solve the problem.
- _____ 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
- _____ 10. I've been pretty successful in life.
- _____ 11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
- _____ 12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

* Test content may be reproduced and used for non-commercial research and educational purposes without seeking written permission.²

¹ C. R. Snyder, Shane J. Lopez, Hal S. Shorey, Kevin L. Rand, and David B. Feldman. 2003, "Hope Theory, Measurements, and Applications to School Psychology," (School Psychology Quarterly 18 (2): 122–39. doi:10.1521/scpq.18.2.122.21854), 17.

² C.R. Snyder, Cheri Harris, John R. Anderson, Sharon A. Holleran, Lori M. Irving, Sandra T. Sigmon, Lauren Yoshinobu, June Gibb, Charyle Langelle, and Pat Harney, ("Hope Scale," PsycTESTS January 1, 1991, doi:10.1037/t00088-000).

Appendix F

Research Participants Needed

Building Hope in Outreach Ministry

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- A Volunteer Worker or Patron of Hope Station Outreach Ministry?

If you answered **yes** to each these questions you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to:

Build understanding of the true nature of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons.

Participants will be asked to attend or participate in:

- 2 surveys (5 minutes each)
- 1 interview (15 minutes)
- 3 teaching sessions (30 minutes each)
- 3 individual or group discussions (up to one hour each)
- 1 outreach event (one to four hours)

Benefits include:

- Developing a greater understanding of Christian hope
- Experiencing an increase of hope in your personal life and ministry
- Becoming better equipped to describe hope as it pertains to present situations
- Inspiring hope in others

If you would like to participate, contact the researcher at the phone number or email address provided below to schedule an interview.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview.

Preston W. Boerner, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact:

Preston Boerner at [REDACTED] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Appendix G

Recruitment Template: Verbal Script (Phone or In Person)

Hello [Potential Participant]

I am a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to build understanding of the true nature of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons. If you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and be a patron or volunteer at Hope Station Outreach Ministry. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in two surveys (5 minutes each), an interview (15 minutes) three teaching sessions (30 minutes each), and three individual or group discussions (up to one hour each), and to attend or participate in at least one outreach event (one to four hours). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate? [Yes] Great, can we set up a time for an interview? [No] I understand. Thank you for your time. [Conclude the conversation.]

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix H

Consent

Title of the Project: Building Christian Hope in Outreach Ministry

Principal Investigator: Preston W. Boerner, Student, Liberty University Rawlings

School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be eighteen years of age and a be patron or volunteer at Hope Station Outreach Ministry of Cornerstone Church of God in Melbourne, Florida. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to build understanding of the true nature of Christian hope among Hope Station workers and patrons. It will then seek to help Hope Station provide food, clothing, and other needed services with a greater focus on building true and lasting hope in Jesus Christ. The study will attempt to measure any meaningful change in the presence of hope among Hope Station patrons and workers.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in an initial informal interview about your relationship with Hope Station and participation in this study. (30 minutes)
2. Complete a written survey designed used to measure levels of hope at the beginning of the project. You will be asked to rate twelve statements on a true/false scale. (10 minutes)
3. Participate in an informal interview that will address three questions on an interactive questionnaire. (20 minutes).
4. Participate in at least three teaching sessions over a two-week period on the nature of Christian hope. (1 hour each)
5. Participate in at least three informal individual or group discussions of hope in specific individual circumstances or ministry applications. (1 hour each)
6. Attend or participate in at least one Hope Station outreach event. (1 to 4 hours)

7. Complete a written survey designed used to measure levels of hope at the end of the project. You will be asked to rate twelve statements on a true/false scale. (10 minutes)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are to develop a greater understanding of Christian hope and to experience an increase of hope in their personal life and ministry. They should also expect to be better equipped to describe hope as it pertains to present situations and to inspire hope in others.

Benefits to society include improving the ministry of Hope Station by helping Hope Station workers obtain a better focus on instilling Christian hope in community outreach and service through exhibiting an improvement in their own personal levels of hope, inspiring hope more effectively in others, and better applying their understanding of hope as it relates to present situations.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study include psychological stress associated with identifying and discussing personal life circumstances and crises. There is also a risk that shared information may trigger mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others. The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

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

Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a in a locked cabinet or on a password-locked computer. After three years, all paper interviews and surveys will be destroyed, and electronic records will be deleted.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, Cornerstone Church of God of Melbourne, or Hope Station Outreach Ministry. 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, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Preston Boerner. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] via phone or text message or via email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Michael Williams, at [REDACTED].

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

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

Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

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

Your Consent

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

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IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 21, 2022

Preston Boerner
Michael Williams

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-712 Building Hope in Outreach Ministry

Dear Preston Boerner and Michael Williams,

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

Decision: No Engagement in Research

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

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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