

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness:
Teaching Living Prayer as a Gateway to a Focused Kingdom Lifestyle**

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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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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It is common for those entering counseling at the Lake Church Counseling Center to lack intimacy with God. When one lacks intimacy with God, they are in imminent danger of becoming influenced exclusively by the world's thinking in one or more areas of life. It is the effort of the LCCC to provide services to those suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. Initially, the counseling center treats such conditions using Living Prayer to help clients strengthen their connection with God and transition to behaviors influenced only by the kingdom of God. This project aims to help Lake Church members learn to use Living Prayer as a gateway to a focused kingdom lifestyle. The intervention's value is that a more focused kingdom lifestyle benefits anyone experiencing a life struggle and that those who will eventually attend counseling sessions at the LCCC will already be familiar with Living Prayer. To deploy the Living Prayer concept to all church members, the researcher selected a group of lay leaders already involved in supporting those with struggles. The group attended a four-hour training seminar followed by a four-week trial period. After the seminar and the trial period, surveys revealed that participants overwhelmingly embraced Living Prayer and their new role as Living Prayer Coaches. The results of this project demonstrate that lay leaders and helpers value training programs aimed at improving their proficiencies and augmenting their gifts.

Keywords: prayer life, kingdom lifestyle, leadership development, Living Prayer.

Dedicated to my father, Donald Painter, who went home
to the Lord before this work was done.

“See you soon, dad.”

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First and foremost, the Lord God, Who inspired me to seek a college education at age 48 and gracefully called me to the ministry for life.

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Dr. Jack Dinsbeer, who has been a great friend, mentor, advisor, and example to me. "Thank you for your enthusiasm, the work of pointing me in the right direction as this project began, and your guidance along the way." Also, to his son Wayne Dinsbeer. "Thank you for being my great friend, encourager, and ministry associate. And thank you for the frequent loan of your dad."

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	<i>Coronavirus Disease of 2019</i>
CT/RT	<i>Choice Theory/Reality Therapy</i>
CBT	<i>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</i>
IBPPC	<i>International Board of Professional and Pastoral Counselors</i>
LCCC	<i>Lake Church Counseling Center</i>
LPC	<i>Living Prayer Coach</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A praying church offers its members, among other things, a place to grow in their relationship with God. A church that teaches the purpose and function of prayer offers its members a place to develop a deep relationship with God that will strengthen their spiritual and public lives.¹ For those deeply committed to being in a relationship with God, God's way of thinking will rub off on them and lead to a more focused kingdom lifestyle. To develop a deep and consistent relationship with God and His kingdom, one must understand that He is all-knowing and ever-present. He is so close that even a whisper has His full attention. Learning that God listens and wants to interact with everyone who seeks Him reveals a powerful aspect of being a child of God.

Evangelical Christians understand God's intellect as vastly superior to their own; they also believe there are potential similarities between His mind and the minds of those who seek to understand Him.² Of God's children, those who earnestly seek to be in continuous communion with Him learn to think more like Him. The more God's children think like Him, the stronger the kingdom's influence becomes, thereby increasing its ability to overcome the world's influence. Such thinking constitutes what this researcher refers to as *kingdom thinking*. Kingdom thinking helps facilitate correction and promotes quality personal and spiritual development. As such, a

¹ John Witvliet, "If It Matters to God, the Church Should Be Praying About It," 65, no. 9 (2021): 50-51, <https://go.exlibris.link/SqCdKNYs>.

² Larisa Heiphetz et al., "How Children and Adults Represent God's Mind," *Cognitive Science* 40, no. 1 (2016): 123, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cogs.12232>.

church dedicated to teaching the full value of prayerful communication with God will be one in which its members flourish.

This research will evaluate current perspectives of prayer and the kingdom of God to understand how the church and theologians in modern times understand and correlate one to the other. By evaluating current scholarly material and popular literature, this research will better, but not wholly, understand the apparent disconnect between prayer and kingdom lifestyle that exists for many members and associates of Lake Church.³ To this end, this research will identify the problem, review related scholarly material and popular literature written within the last ten years, propose a solution to the identified problem, evaluate the effects of the subsequent intervention, and propose next-step actions for the church.

Ministry Context

Lake Church

Lake Church is situated in a portion of Duval County, Florida, which was once a rural area, but is now a busy, thriving part of the City of Jacksonville, Florida. It is common for longtime members to talk about the dirt road that once passed in front of the church. Lake Church is an evangelical Baptist church not associated with any governing commission, board, or organization; however, according to its pastor, it identifies as a Southern Baptist church and ascribes to the basic tenets of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is now, as it was when it began in 1962, a Bible-preaching church. Lake Church is dedicated to telling every visitor the truth of creation, sin, hell, salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and eternal life in the kingdom of God, directly from the Holy Bible.

³ Lake Church is a pseudonym used to protect the staff and members of the actual church being researched.

Lake Church has a congregation of nearly 130 adults, with an average attendance of about 80 people for Sunday service. Sunday morning classes (Sunday school) have an average attendance of forty people, while Sunday and Wednesday evening classes teach about twenty people on average. Its pastor has led Lake Church for twenty-eight years, and his father-in-law led the church for the twenty-nine years prior. Lake Church has many related generations, making for a consistent membership base. It has a naturally associated work and leadership core; a product of its dynamic family depth of membership. Because of its multigenerational membership, it is an apparent family-friendly environment for all ages.

Community

Jacksonville, Florida is situated in northeast Florida and is the largest city in the United States, based on its landmass.⁴ Its residential population is more than 850,000, with an additional non-resident population supplied by six area military bases, ten colleges, and seasonal tourism. Jacksonville is governed by an elected mayor and city council of nine members. Its employment opportunities cover a wide range of industries and income levels. Jacksonville has a dynamic offering of employment opportunities that include retail, service, manufacturing, import/export, military support, recreation and tourism, medical, and corporate environments. Its recreational and relaxation features include Atlantic beaches, the St. Johns River, and one of the largest accessible park systems in the United States.

Lake Church is located on the line of two city zip codes with a combined population of 56,329 residents in 23,530 households. The area of 32217 has 8,270 households and 19,899 residents, which has a majority makeup of 63.37% white, 17.14% black, and 9.08% Hispanic

⁴ City of Jacksonville, "Official City of Jacksonville and Duval County Government Website: About Jacksonville," City of Jacksonville Florida, 2022, accessed January, 2022, <http://www.COJ.net>.

residents. Its adjusted average gross household income is \$77,100.00, with a median household income of \$47,715.00. The area of 32257 has 15,260 households and 36,430 residents, which has a majority makeup of 54% white, 22.5% black, and 13.7% Hispanic residents. Its adjusted average gross household income is \$66,340.00, with a median household income of \$57,967.00. The residential component of Lake Church's community runs north and south, with the St. Johns River to its west and a large expanse of office/commercial properties along a state highway to its east.

Ministries

Lake Church's most substantial ministry is its daycare, preschool, and K-8 Christian Academy. It cares for, teaches, and ministers to about 200 children. Several school staff and faculty members are members of the church, but the school has struggled to engage many families of enrolled children in church activities. The school is not regionally accredited, but it is known to produce students who excel academically and exceed the minimum standards required for enrollment in any public or private school in Jacksonville, Florida, and its surrounding communities. Students are well acquainted with Jesus Christ because of the school's use of the Abeka Christian school curriculum and a faculty committed to teaching from the Bible. Many students accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior each school year.

Five years ago, the current pastor announced that the Lord had led him to establish Lake Church as a church of prayer. The resulting ministry, called Prayer Partners, was established, and staffed with twelve committed ministry servants. The team has maintained consistent membership of most of its original twelve active members, replacing only one member couple.⁵ The prayer team was assigned the responsibility of praying for the pastor, the ministries of Lake

⁵ The Lake Church Prayer Partners team includes what it calls the "extended team", which serves to strengthen the prayer initiative as a more church-wide effort.

Church, its missionaries, members and community, and the prayer requests it receives. Each Sunday morning, the team meets at 8:30 in a room designated as the war room, reviews the prayer list, and prays over those things and people with whom it is charged. As a part of every Sunday morning service, a member of the team, or another person assigned, will provide to the congregation a short prayer lesson, a praise report, and an invitation to submit their requests to the team on a provided green form. Additionally, a team of two is assigned to pray as the pastor teaches and is also available for prayer at the front of the church during the pastor's invitation.

Lake Church is a giving church. It has multiple outlets for giving to the needy in its community. It has a food pantry where families needing food can receive various nutritional items. Surplus food and other items are made available to families of the school children in the school lobby from time to time. The Thelma Project is a monthly program providing a service opportunity for a team of servants to prepare bag lunches for distribution at a downtown homeless shelter.

An IBPPC Board Certified Christian Counselor manages the Lake Church Counseling Center. It serves members of Lake Church for free and non-members on a sliding scale to ensure that anyone needing counseling can receive it from a Christian practitioner. Even though it is a ministry of Lake Church, the counseling ministry operates as an independent Florida non-profit organization for funding and insurance autonomy. Most of its participating members are members of Lake Church; however, its board of directors includes non-members who bring to the ministry other skills and knowledge not necessarily available at Lake Church.

The Members

Each week the Lake Church membership is reminded that they belong to a praying church. The members appear to accept their responsibility to pray and request prayer on behalf of

others, as evidenced by the variety of people who engage the prayer team. It is also common to hear members tell each other that they are praying for them, sometimes without an apparent reason. In addition to having a developed prayer strategy as an integrated part of the church ministry, Lake Church aspires to be a body of active evangelists, seeking out opportunities to serve its local community. Lake Church identifies itself as a friendly, giving body, and believes its neighborhood knows them as such a group of people. The members understand that their neighborhood is their responsibility, and they often conduct prayer walks, door-to-door invitations, and community events designated as invitation opportunities. Lake Church's members have an instilled boldness that drives them to speak of the Lord with those they meet in the community.

Response to COVID-19

Like most American churches, Lake Church had seen a decline in regular attendance due to the community's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. However, recent growth in new attendance has kept its attendance relatively constant with pre-COVID-19 recordings. Lake Church put much effort into remaining active, if not open, through the related COVID-19 closure and social distancing periods. The staff and teachers conducted Facebook Live sessions, broadcasted parking lot events for Sunday morning service, and had live Zoom classes every day of the week.

This Researcher

In 2017, this researcher, a pastoral counselor, was invited to Lake Church and has served as its staff counselor ever since. He was also one of the first members invited to join the prayer team known as Prayer Partners. As a leadership team member, staff counselor, and prayer team member, he has been privy to the emotional, spiritual, and collective struggles of the

membership, leadership, and the relative community.⁶ He has been an integral part of keeping the church moving forward through the COVID-19 crisis and has witnessed first-hand how every aspect of the church functions through general crisis and personal trauma.

As an extension of his service as a staff counselor, Lake Church was obliged to allow the researcher to serve as an intern to complete his master's in pastoral counseling (MAPC). After completing his internship, the pastor suggested that a new counseling department be started and become an associated, but separated entity of Lake Church. In this way, the counseling ministry might be eligible for grants and funding opportunities not previously available to the church. At that time, this pastoral counselor had accumulated all the qualifying requirements to become an International Board of Professional and Pastoral Counselors, Board Certified Christian Counselor.

From the decision to begin a new ministry, the Lake Church Counseling Center (LCCC) was established as a Florida nonprofit organization.⁷ This pastoral counselor continues to serve the members of Lake Church as its staff counselor and receives external counselees. The LCCC serves as a general pastoral counseling office, serving the church and the community in marriage and family, grief, addiction and recovery, and life coaching.

Problem Presented

The problem at Lake Church is that many members entering counseling lack intimacy with God and therefore do not live a fully focused kingdom lifestyle. Nearly one hundred percent

⁶ No breach of confidence. The researcher has not used any personal information or general information that might lead to the revealing of any person who has requested prayer or submitted a prayer request to the prayer team in the process of conducting this research or the writing of this manuscript.

⁷ Lake Church Counseling Center is a pseudonym for the actual counseling program.

of the Lake Church members who engage this staff counselor in discussions related to perceived problems do not indicate having taken their complaint to the Lord. Likewise, those entering formal counseling with presentations of emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles have failed to seek adjustment by directly engaging with God. Even for many who are relatively mature in God's Word, it can be difficult to seek biblical resolution when there are any worldly influences. It is apparent that when a problem is associated with worldly thinking, most people that are caught up in its confusion will fail to seek God and His way of thinking as the solution.⁸ Because of their temporary or longstanding spiritual confusion, counseling often resembles a spiritual formation or reformation program. Of course, pastoral counseling always focuses on moving people closer to the Lord and kingdom thinking.

In other cases, Christian church members engage this counselor in what he refers to as "drive-by" sessions. It is common for Christian members to stop this counselor at the beginning or end of Sunday morning services, for example, to solicit answers for their emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles. Their presentations typically include no indication that they have engaged God in their situation or are hopeful that He is working on their behalf. Generally, the response they receive from this counselor is one that directs them to communicate with God in one way or another. Because of their neglect and relative distance from God, many go on their way feeling as though they received no practical help. The danger for Christians who do not seek God in difficult times is that their lack of intimacy with Him will cause them to become stuck in worldly conditions that afflict them.

⁸ Shirley M. Timmons, "A Christian Faith-Based Recovery Theory: Understanding God as Sponsor," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 4 (2012): 1158, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-010-9422-z>.

Adding to the concern that some members lack intimacy with God are the contents of many prayer requests submitted to the Lake Church prayer team. Frequently, members submitting requests for themselves, extended family, friends, and associates, do so by only describing a problem. Without a provided prayer context or any indication of how the requester is affected, this counselor is frequently concerned that the prayer requests do not reflect the requesting party's needs. Therefore, it appears that those requesting prayer support for others fail to give equal attention to how the circumstance affects them. When this is the case, the member may not have engaged the Lord in helping them alleviate their own anxiety, potentiating future emotional struggles.

Although it is likely that members experiencing emotional struggles will eventually seek counseling from a pastor, pastoral counselor, or lay helpers, the prayer team may be the first to contact a struggling member. Therefore, since some members seeking counseling may indeed lack intimacy with God, it can be expected that those individuals may also request prayer directly from prayer team members. Prayer being directly requested of a prayer team member or other Lake Church helper provides an opportunity to coach members to consider their own condition and learn to approach the Lord personally and immediately. However, prayer team members are not explicitly trained as emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development helpers and are not trained in employing or teaching Living Prayer. Prayer team members may lack the confidence to serve as helpers due to their lack of training or may not feel prepared to help members verbalize how they are affected by the item identified in their prayer request. As such, they may lack the skills to convert direct prayer request interactions to discussions on how to engage directly with God for His care.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry action research project is to help Lake Church members learn to use Living Prayer as a gateway to a focused kingdom lifestyle. The project's overarching objective is to use the Lake Church prayer team to help members learn to make an intimate connection with God through Living Prayer. This will move them toward a more focused kingdom lifestyle as needed. It is common for Christians suffering from the effects of loss, relational problems, anxiety, stress, disappointment, or faith issues to reach out to persons known to participate in petitionary and intercessory prayer. At Lake Church, the prayer team is well known by all members to participate in such prayer initiatives. Therefore, the researcher will engage the Lake Church prayer team in a training program to develop Living Prayer coaches. The objective is to prepare and deploy a team of lay helpers into Lake Church that will act as the first line of support for those experiencing the disequilibrium associated with worldly thinking. The team will help members with conditions that cause emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development problems that distract from kingdom thinking, making way for bad behavior and diminishing hope.

For prayer team members to gain confidence and learn to use Living Prayer as a helping tool for members dealing with emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles, they will need specialized training. Living Prayer Coach (LPC) training will be conducted using a four-hour seminar-style training session. Participating prayer team members will learn the concept of using Living Prayer to help move members toward increased intimacy with God and His kingdom. They will learn the value of using Living Prayer as a method to help move people through the minor and major misconceptions inspired by a chaotic worldview to a

better way of thinking. They will learn to teach Living Prayer as a method to develop a focused kingdom lifestyle that inspires faith, identifies hope, and provides for peace.

Participants will strengthen their understanding that an intentionally ceaseless commitment to live in intimacy with the kingdom of God will provide one a better chance to recognize God working in their life. They will learn and understand that every time a person experiences the care of God, their hope increases, which moves them farther away from the flawed thinking of the world. They will further understand that the world's corruption does not influence the reality found in the kingdom of God. Finally, they will connect with their role as helpers to the pastor, staff counselors, and other lay helpers to help move members toward a more personal relationship with the Lord. The anticipated outcome is that Lake Church members who enter passive or formal counseling will have at least a basic understanding of the concept of Living Prayer.

Basic Assumptions

This research proposes to affect the kingdom of God by helping move Christians toward a focused kingdom lifestyle. Ultimately, moving a Christian toward a more focused kingdom life benefits the kingdom in numerous ways, but in the context of Lake Church, kingdom growth stands to strengthen the members and supply energy to strengthen the local ministry. Therefore, the researcher must seek to exercise the proposed purpose by specifically engaging Lake Church members and assume those who are at-heart or formal members of Lake Church are Christians. By extension, the researcher assumes that the Lake Church prayer team members are truthful about their salvation in Jesus Christ.

Identifying as a Christian does not guarantee well-being. A person who fails to adjust from emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles is not living in alignment with the kingdom of God. For a Christian, correction away from the world's influence happens when their thinking realigns with kingdom thinking. Therefore, it is assumed that there is value in having a team of wise lay counselors available to Lake Church members who are specifically trained to help them move closer to God in their times of struggle.

The researcher will use a comparative analysis of two questionnaires to identify negative or positive movements in participants' level of understanding and confidence. Participants will complete these questionnaires at specific times during the trial period to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The researcher assumes that all participants who respond to the associated surveys are truthful regarding their experiences through the training and trial period.

Definitions

This project is born out of the pastoral counseling program of Lake Church known as Lake Church Counseling Center. It seeks to address a condition recognized by that office, and through the church's prayer ministry activities known as Prayer Partners. The terminology used will, in some cases, be recognizable by common use, will be specific to the disciplines of pastoral counseling, theology, and psychology, and in other cases, will be uniquely applied to the project. This list of words and term definitions is provided to ensure there is no ambiguity in the terms and phrases used, given that the research is multidisciplinary.

Action Research. Action research is a type of research that allows an individual to work on a problem that exists in the context of their own circumstances. Earnest T. Stringer defines action research as “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective

solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives.”⁹ For this thesis project, action research is used to indicate the method used to identify and effect a condition that exists at Lake Church.

Adjustment. Adjustment or personal adjustment refers to the condition of adjusting away from the negative emotional, relational, or personal development experience caused by poor reactions to, or interactions with, related social or personal environments.

Certified Mental Health Coach First Responders (C-MHC). Certified Mental Health Coach First Responders are persons trained through a forty-hour online training program of the American Association of Christian Counselors by the same name.

Kingdom Lifestyle. “In a world characterized by self-obsession and searching for answers within, Jesus’s message is to deny yourself and follow Him.”¹⁰ The act of seeking answers from within oneself represents a lifestyle exclusive from the kingdom of God. But the lifestyle of following Jesus Christ, as Jeremy Treat explains, “comes within the context of the kingdom of God.”¹¹ George Eldon Ladd contributes to the definition of kingdom lifestyle, explaining its governing purpose. He explains that the kingdom of God is a place where God reigns, His will is identifiable, and one who is in God's will appreciates His blessings.¹²

The kingdom of God, the kingdom. The kingdom of God is considered in many ways, depending on whom one asks. It is contemplated from the standpoint of God’s physical domain,

⁹ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 1, <https://libertyonline.vitalsource.com/books/9781483320731>.

¹⁰ Jeremy R. Treat, *Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019, 2019), 86.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 86.

¹² George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 14.

the relativity of God's abstract rule, and based on a perspective of time, place, occupancy, and its relationship to the world.¹³ For the purpose of this research, the kingdom or the kingdom of God will be understood as the kingdom Jesus Christ described in Luke 17:20-30. The kingdom is a spiritual place where God is the ruler, found in and around the hearts of those who are saved by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ It is the place that cannot be seen, where God is the only inspiration, and his children are weaned away from the influences of the world.¹⁵

Lay Helper. Lay helpers are not ordained ministers, board-certified counselors, or licensed practitioners who assist the pastor of their church in helping members or other individuals with emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.¹⁶

Transfer of Learning or Learning Transfer. Transfer of learning is understood as the endpoint of the learning process whereby the learner transfers the information consumed into a real-life application as a new interrelated competency.¹⁷

Living Prayer. There is not a definition for Living Prayer readily found in scientific or theological literature; however, the term is used in this thesis project and must be defined. The term is used to denote the act of using prayer to move from one place to another place of superior quality using prayer as the means. Rom Harré provides a definition of living that fits well with

¹³ Alfredo Romagosa, "Teilhard, the Kingdom and the World," *Heythrop Journal* 58, no. 1 (2017): 124-26, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12151>.

¹⁴ Treat, 15.

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, [Rev.]. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), <https://go.exlibris.link/nLZ4ttwg>.

¹⁶ Stella Potgieter, "Communities: Development of Church-Based Counselling Teams," *Hervormde teologiese studies* 71, no. 2 (2015): 1-2, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.2050>.

¹⁷ Etienne Rivière et al., "Debriefing for the Transfer of Learning: The Importance of Context," *Academic medicine* 94, no. 6 (2019), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000002612>.

the intent of this action research project: “The natural sciences have achieved their enormous successes by the adoption of schemata through which the indeterminate world around us can be made to disclose some of its features.”¹⁸ The concept described points to more than simply discovering an aspect of the environment in which one is engaged. It identifies an intentional process of causing to become available, deep knowledge of that which is not outwardly apparent.

To truly engage one’s selected environment, one must also develop deep environmental unity. Mari Ruti shares the concept that intentional movement toward one’s potential results in intra-environmental development. He explains that people are always in the “process of becoming” and that each person's responsibility is to engage the spirit of change to better flourish in their relative situation.¹⁹ Harré and Ruti describe the concept of life as using one’s environmental resources to their fullest to move from where they are to who they will become. Adding prayer as the environmental factor for change completes the definition. Living Prayer is the concept by which one uses prayer to move toward who they can become by engaging God; according to John 10:10, God is the giver of abundance in life and life everlasting.

Member or member of Lake Church. A member is a Christian who is a frequent or regular attendee of Lake Church services or is a formal member of Lake Church.

Living Prayer Coach. Living Prayer Coaches (LPC) are lay helpers trained to coach members to use Living Prayer as a tool for adjusting from the world's emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.

¹⁸ Rom Harré, *Acts of Living*, vol. 289 (Washington, DC: American Society for the Advancement of Science, 2000), 1303. Hare is comparing acts of life with drama when making the referenced statement.

¹⁹ Mari Ruti, *The Call of Character: Living a Life Worth Living*, vol. Book, Whole (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/>.

Limitations

The associated action research project intends to affect the spiritual state of those entering counseling by teaching a group of Lake Church lay helpers to share a spiritual formation technique with those who may potentially seek counseling. To accomplish this, the researcher will teach a group of existing lay helpers from the Lake Church prayer team the concept of Living Prayer, expecting them to teach the same concept to others. Participants will learn to coach members to use prayer to adjust from worldly thinking to a mindset that reflects a focus on the Kingdom of God. The purpose is to precondition those entering counseling in the future to engage the Lord in the counseling process. To realize the results, the staff counselor will need ample time to evaluate the condition of those entering formal counseling to identify if the intervention has had the desired outcome. The amount of time allocated in the intervention design will not allow the researcher time to collect enough information to report on it in this paper.

The intervention identified in this paper endeavors to improve the helping abilities and styles of those it has selected as participants. However, change is an endeavor that can require a long-term commitment and may take longer for some than for others. Consequently, this action research project aims to affect the helping style of the participants through training, but the researcher will not be able to evaluate the actual long-term individual outcomes of those affected by the associated training. The researcher will be limited to gathering the participants' opinions after their training sessions, and after a four-week trial period.

Although the selected prayer team members (past, active, extended, and eligible) represent approximately ten percent of the active membership of Lake Church, the number of participants will be small because of the church's small size overall.

Delimitations

The participants of this action research project will be selected from past, active, extended, and eligible prayer team members of Lake Church. Selecting prayer team members ensures that the team to be trained to serve as LPCs will be spiritually mature, knowledgeable about the value and necessity of prayer, and are considered leaders in the church.

The focus of this research project will be to consider whether the associated training of this project strengthens the ability of a specific group of lay helpers to support those who present with emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development-related stress. Choosing a sample group from the general church population, visitors to the church, youth groups, or members of other churches offers too many variables considering the small sample size available. Since prayer team members are known to be leaders in the church, only prayer team members will comprise the pool from which participants will be selected.

Thesis Statement

If Lake Church members intentionally engage in Living Prayer to increase intimacy with God, then they will develop a focused kingdom lifestyle. One leads to the other. One who intentionally engages in Living Prayer will develop a cognitive awareness of how a kingdom lifestyle overcomes the corruptive thinking of the world. The existence of a Living Prayer initiative indicates that the individual is deliberately seeking all methods of communication with God to increase their intimacy with Him and His kingdom. A growing member of Lake Church has a genuine desire to improve their knowledge of God and seeks to learn from His feedback to their prayers on a minute-by-minute basis. By having a desire to pray and receive feedback from God, members will more frequently engage in God's Word, seek application opportunities,

diligently identify God's hand in their circumstances, and abandon the worldly thinking that distracts them from their purpose in the kingdom.

Balance or equilibrium occurs when one can resource their spiritual connectedness and God-provided strength to counteract the propensity to allow the world to move them away from God's will.²⁰ When one becomes disconnected from God to the point of ambivalence with the world and avoidance of God, they become spiritually weak and prone to negative emotional responses and diminished faith.²¹ The more that Christians learn about God's will, the more they desire to live their lives in His kingdom, doing as kingdom dwellers do. This transformative process begins with an intentional conversation with God, which is a gateway to a more focused kingdom lifestyle. The result of appreciating a deeper kingdom life is that members will move farther and farther away from a life guided by a chaotic worldview to the stability of a kingdom lifestyle.

To move a church and its members in the direction of the kingdom, kingdom dwellers are responsible for doing as Paul calls them to do in Romans 14:19. Christians are to provide for peace by throwing off the friction and controversies of the world, exchanging such thinking for those things of the kingdom that unite in the edification of deeper biblical understanding.²² Proverbs 27:17 makes it clear that Christians are to serve each other by persistently striving to make each other better when it says: "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance

²⁰ Heidemarie Kremer et al., "The Association between Compassionate Love and Spiritual Coping with Trauma in Men and Women Living with Hiv," *Religions* 5, no. 4 (2014): 1051-52, <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel5041050>.

²¹ Julian Culver, "How Consistency in Closeness to God Predicts Psychological Resources and Life Satisfaction: Findings from the National Study of Youth and Religion," *Journal of social and Personal Relationships* 38, no. 1 (2021): 104, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265407520956710>.

²² Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, "Interculturality in Peace-Building and Mutual Edification (Rm 14:19)," *Hervormde teologiese studies* 75, no. 4 (2019), <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5259>.

of his friend.” (KJV) That being so, Lake Church will benefit its members by developing a team that can help them teach others how to better connect to kingdom thinking, strengthen biblical understanding, and learn to strengthen their connection to the supplier of hope and peace.

When members have a strong bond with the kingdom of God and the thinking associated with it, resilience against life struggles is possible, if not likely.²³ Those dedicated to continuous and open communication with the Lord are less likely to experience the struggles that are so often associated with the world’s influence. Adjustment is more complicated for those who have allowed themselves to slip some distance from the kingdom's influence. It is necessary for one seeking an adjustment to work in collaboration with God.²⁴ God is the only one who knows everything about everyone and is fully capable of helping them produce outcomes based only on kingdom thinking. Members who are personally capable of developing a more intimate relationship with God will find adjustment easier. For church members who have lost their intimacy with God and His kingdom, counseling may be their only way to move back into alignment with its thinking.

Lake Church counselors use an approach referred to as Living Prayer as their initial approach to adjustment. Its purpose is to help every counselee begin to with the Lord for His influence on their presenting problem. Most new counselees are surprised when they learn of the Living Prayer approach used by the counseling team, which is what this project intends to affect. By training LPCs who will take the Living Prayer concept to the members of Lake Church,

²³ Holly Nelson-Becker, and Michael Thomas, "Religious/Spiritual Struggles and Spiritual Resilience in Marginalised Older Adults," *Religions* 11, no. 9 (2020): 2-3, <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel11090431>.

²⁴ Stacy C. Parenteau, and Haibo Wu, "Religious Problem-Solving Styles and Life Satisfaction: Exploring God, the Will and the Way," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 6 (2021): 4452, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01159-5>.

fewer new counselees will be surprised when they learn of the program's approach to adjustment.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Introduction

Pastors, Christian counselors, lay leaders, and counselees will benefit when Christians, who enter counseling or seek other methods of spiritual support, participate with an expectation of encountering God.²⁵ Many Christians have a limited concept of God, having learned to understand Him based on taught imagery that identifies Him based only on His characteristics, not His personhood.²⁶ For pastoral counselors, the sooner a counselee engages with the person of God as a part of the helping team, the sooner the counselee will begin to realize relief and correction. Counselees must understand God as an involved participant and be willing to engage Him in conversation intentionally and actively. Additionally, therapy outcomes are improved when the counselee believes that they and the counselor have a mutual understanding of God's involvement in the process.²⁷

The purpose of the following literature review is to identify existing research that relates to how someone participating in an active conversation with God (prayer) can move from their current place to a place of intimacy with the God of the kingdom. This researcher anticipates an abundance of existing research on the value of intimacy with God through prayer and on how

²⁵ Miles Matise, Jeffery Ratcliff, and Flavia Mosci, "A Working Model for the Integration of Spirituality in Counseling," *Journal of spirituality in mental health* 20, no. 1 (2018), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2017.1326091>.

²⁶ Hannah Barnhill Bayne, and Marie Tylsova, "Understanding and Incorporating God Representations within Counseling," *Counseling and values* 64, no. 2 (2019): 150, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cvj.12112>.

²⁷ Joseph M. Currier et al., "A Practice-Based Evidence Investigation of God Representations in Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapies," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 77, no. 4 (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23075>.

familiarity with the kingdom of God can help one transition to a more focused kingdom lifestyle. The researcher also expects that there will be a gap in the research concerning how one can use Living Prayer as a functional bridge from the chaos of the world to a place of more rapid adjustment by being led by God to one's purpose in the kingdom. This review will survey current scholarly and popular literature to identify current understandings of the various aspects of prayer, intimacy with God, and God's Kingdom, and subsequently identify how those understandings contribute to this research and recognize the relevant gaps that this action research project can fill.

Intimacy with the God of the Kingdom

In 2011, the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* announced that: "Although intimacy with God is an essential element of one's Christian experience, it is nonetheless a neglected field of theological study."²⁸ Just one year later, Dallas Willard wrote: "It is very important to remember and to always keep before your mind this fact: You are an unceasing spiritual being, created for an intimate and transforming friendship with the creative community that is the Trinity."²⁹ Dallas Willard inspired theologians to return to the study of intimacy with God in the years after the 2012 release of *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. In his book, *The Magnificent Journey*, James Bryan Smith wrote the

²⁸ Michael D. Fiorello, "Aspects of Intimacy with God in the Book of Job," *Journal of spiritual formation and soul care* 4, no. 2 (2011 2011): 155, <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/>.

²⁹ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God, Updated and Expanded* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012, 2012), 10.

following dedication: "To Dallas Willard, who invited me and guided me on this magnificent journey of eternal living, without whom I would not have known it existed."³⁰

The previous paragraph illustrates the newness of the contemporary view of the value of intimacy with God. Since that time, researchers and theologians have developed an understanding that "God still speaks to us today in many ways," indicating that God and his Word are at a minimum alive and active in the lives of those who engage with Him.³¹ Engagement with God cannot be an intermittent endeavor, but it must be ongoing and continuous. Rosalind Banbury speaks of the developing life as one in which a person can live abundantly through constant intimacy with God: "Intimacy with God is foundational both to lament and to abundant life." When one intentionally and constantly interacts with God for the genuine purpose of understanding Him, their mutual relationship with Him will exponentially improve through the good times and the struggles.³² Therefore, it is necessary to lament, not to get God's attention, but to identify and fully face life's struggles in preparation for taking them to Him.³³

Banbury's suggestion that intimacy is something one must labor to find does not seem to agree with the concept of intimacy; however, the article does illustrate that the conversation of

³⁰ James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Journey: Living Deep in the Kingdom*, Apprentice Resources (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018, 2018).

³¹ Smith, 61.; Cristina Gangemi, "The Word of God Alive and at Work," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 3 (2012), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15228967.2012.703804>.

³² Rosalind Banbury, "Into the Light: Finding Hope through Prayers of Lament," *The Presbyterian Outlook* 202, no. 16 (2020): 35, <https://go.exlibris.link/KBcBdXgX>; Edward Collins Vacek, "Discernment within a Mutual Love Relationship with God: A New Theological Foundation," *Theological Studies (Baltimore)* 74, no. 3 (2013), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/004056391307400307>.

³³ Judy Thomson, "Holistic Healing: Faith, Prayer and Lament," 199, no. Generic (2017): 13, <https://go.exlibris.link/s1d7HBdH>.

intimacy with God has begun when the labor of seeking is present. James Bryan Smith agrees that when one understands that God is actively involved in their life, they immediately realize He desires to "interact" with them all of the time, not just once in a while.³⁴ Seeking God does require a daily initiative, but one must remember that God is more than willing to live intimately with His children. Realizing that God desires such a relationship is the first evidence of growth in the kingdom. The next indicator is how deeply involved they are with God on a daily basis.

Jeremy R. Treat explains that Christians must understand that life with God is possible because of a living Savior.³⁵ Treat is identifying that since God is alive and fully available to everyone, thanks to the saving grace of Jesus Christ, God will provide an abundant kingdom in which to live.³⁶ God wants people to put Him first, which is the only way to have a completely intimate life with anyone.³⁷ Treat reminds his readers that Jesus commands His followers to "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). This is the one thing that changes everything. According to Jesus, what matters most in life is the Kingdom of God."³⁸ The practicality of Treat's message is that God is not only willing to live in intimacy with His children, but He also demands it.

Today, the consensus among Christian researchers appears to be that only through active intimacy with the living God can one enjoy an abundant kingdom life. Patrick Schreiner, while

³⁴ Smith, 81.

³⁵ Treat, 59.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Stephen Farris, "Don't Put Family First: Give That Spot to God," *The Presbyterian Record (Montreal)* 140, no. 3 (2016), <https://go.exlibris.link/8nNLY65P>.

³⁸ Treat, 13-14.

identifying the scope of the kingdom, acknowledges that the Bible is full of promises made by God, and that "when Jesus announces that the "kingdom of God" is at hand, he is announcing that in His person all of the promises of God are yes and amen."³⁹ Schreiner explains that the kingdom is the place of biblical promise, brought into being by the shedding of Jesus's blood on the cross.⁴⁰ By His blood, Jesus established at the cross a place for Himself and His people.

Schreiner's point is that God's Kingdom is a state of unity between a sovereign God and His people, where God's promises, as cataloged throughout the Bible, are fulfilled by the blood of Jesus Christ. Schreiner and Mitchell make it possible to identify the kingdom of God as a place of intimacy between God and His people where one can flourish and become the person God created him to be. Mitchell sets up the argument that God's kingdom is a place exclusive from the world, where one can, if they choose, be a part of "His will is done, on earth as in heaven."⁴¹

Christians Living in the Kingdoms of Earth

Samuel Deressa explains that in Martin Luther's *two kingdoms theology*, Luther identifies the existence of two interconnected kingdoms, the spiritual and temporal.⁴² Luther's objective was to explain how church leaders and government officials were erroneously exploiting the concepts of spiritual and temporal kingdoms. The government attempted to rule from within the spiritual realm, while the church imposed itself on the civil authority from the temporal

³⁹ Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, vol. Book, Whole (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, 2018), 87-88. <https://go.exlibris.link/GH7VkQIP>.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 88.

⁴¹ Andrew Mitchell, "Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done: A Study of Matthew 6:10," *Bulletin for Biblical research* 30, no. 2 (2020): 228, <https://dx.doi.org/10.5325/bullbiblrese.30.2.0208>.

⁴² Samuel Deressa, "Luther on Two Kingdoms Theology and Christian Education," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 55, no. 3 (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.3316/informat.253794033944260>.

perspective. Both agencies were out of their lane. Even though Luther was not specifically teaching about the makeup of the kingdoms, there is great value in recognizing the two facets of the kingdom.

Luther identifies the kingdom of Christ as the spiritual kingdom, which serves at the throne's right hand.⁴³ It attends to all things eternal, provides for peace, salvation, and joy, and is the manager of heaven. The temporal kingdom, on the other hand, is related to the place of the world. Its makeup is of God-following servants intent on providing guidance, structure, and order on earth with God as King. It serves with God at its head and stands as a device for overcoming evil. Luther's spiritual and temporal kingdoms are considered one in God and referred to as the kingdom of God or the kingdom. Those kingdoms not of God are known as the kingdoms of earth, worldly kingdoms, or simply *the world*.

Human beings live in and react to a world filled with the worst things any human being can imagine. James Bryan Smith acknowledges the condition of the world when he says: "The world around us is scary. I find it hard to watch the news. Terrorism, earthquakes, and unnatural disasters seem to abound."⁴⁴ Smith provides some insight into the concept of worldly kingdoms, which this researcher considers temporal, but not of God, differentiating the kingdoms of earth from the kingdom of God. As did the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:13, Smith acknowledges that the "things of the world" are the kingdoms of the world that are powered by darkness. He provides a detailed explanation of the motives of the dark forces, and illustrates why those who think like the world have a difficult time surviving the world. "The values and power structures

⁴³ Deressa.

⁴⁴ Smith, 45.

of the kingdoms of this world are built on force and violence, power and lust, greed and evil desires"—explaining that people of worldly kingdoms are of carnal flesh at their core.

Smith adds to the conversation of this research by identifying that the power of the world's addictions is stronger than the one living in the world.⁴⁵ As accurate as Smith's assertion is, he identifies the most powerful addictions as those related to substances and sex. He states: "*This process works not just for the addict. It is for all of us all of the time.*"⁴⁶ Smith, referring to using the power of God, makes a true statement but seems to marginalize other weaknesses of the flesh. Nevertheless, Smith is a valuable asset in evaluating the differences between living in the world and living in the kingdom of God.

Schreiner, while discussing the choices Jesus Christ provided man at the cross, asks: "So what are we going to do with this bloody King? Will we accept him or turn from him? Will we seek to construct our own kingdom, or will we submit to his upside-down kingdom?"⁴⁷ Schreier complements Smith's work as he attends to the beginning of the rebellion. Schreiner explains that the ability to rebel against God is passed on from Adam's kingdom. The process of establishing a personal kingdom or submitting to an existing kingdom of the world is an act of rebellion.⁴⁸ After salvation, man's biggest challenge, thanks to Adam, is his propensity to become diverted from God's kingdom to one made by himself, or that otherwise satisfies his flesh.

According to Jeremy Treat, many people make life about themselves, building personal earthly kingdoms of those things available to them in the world. One should not be surprised to

⁴⁵ Smith, 47.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, 86.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 33. Schreiner identifies Adam as the one having received the "commission to be the king to rule the earth . . ." Thus, the use of the term *kingdom*.

learn that many of these earthly kingdom builders are Christians. Treat believes that man makes life about himself, suggesting that his effort to rebel against God's will is really about finding himself. It is scary to imagine, but according to Treat, even Christians can slip away from the kingdom of God as they seek to discover who they are in their current state of life, whereby building kingdoms where they are the authority.⁴⁹

Both Schreiner and Treat suggest through their analyses that some Christians attempt to live a dual-kingdom lifestyle. Willard expands on this thought by identifying that some Christians have no interest in hearing from God when things are going well, but they are quick to call on Him when they are in trouble.⁵⁰ Willard warns: "Anyone who rejects the general counsel of Scripture is in fact planning not to be guided by God and then cannot rely on being able to be delivered from their difficulties by obtaining God's input on particular occasions." Together, Schreiner, Treat, and Willard inspire the acknowledgment that a Christian worldview corrupted by the thinking of a kingdom of the world renders that worldview defeated by rebellion, and not a Christian worldview at all.

Smith lists what one loses by not hearing God because of willful complacency or rebellion. They are:

- an all-access pass to the kingdom of God
- guidance and direction for the things you need
- discernment for difficult decisions
- character that comes as a result of obedience to the words given
- faith, hope, and love⁵¹

⁴⁹ Treat, 33.

⁵⁰ Willard, 258-59.

⁵¹ Smith, 69.

Gerald Goldman describes the place of the kingdom in which man wishes [deep in their person] to rest as "a world of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, where all humanity and creation are given dignity and respect and are embraced in love and with joy."⁵² These things are also lost or diminished when one is distracted away from the kingdom of God. Goldman and Smith together provide a glimpse of why people take it so hard when they separate from God because of the corruption of their self-created kingdoms. In such a state of distraction, Christians are moved away from peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, and joy into a personal place of uproar, judgment, ruthlessness, conflict, hate, and sorrow.

Smith helps identify one of the primary reasons people are inclined to create personal kingdoms. He explains that Christians often miss out on the magnificence of the kingdom of God because of distractions, bad influencers, emotions, and the desire to find the easy way out. Due to the fall, man is drawn to darkness and depravity, and when they contemplate these places and conditions, they feel the anxiety that accompanies the grief of believing that they are stuck in their poor condition. They feel alone and abandoned by the God of the kingdom they abandoned. Just as an intentional effort to know God enhances the God/Man relationship, the act of allowing distraction creates separation.⁵³

Collectively, the resources identified aid this research by recognizing the losses people experience and how they contribute to the disequilibrium of those living in the kingdoms they construct. These researchers agree that distractions, caused by the attention given to the world's kingdoms, are dangerous to how one interacts with the kingdom of God. They provide the

⁵² Gerard M. Goldman, "Church: Seeking First the Kingdom of God," *Compass* 44, no. 2 (2010): 3, <https://go.exlibris.link/>.

⁵³ Smith, 13. Emphasis mine.

groundwork for evaluating how the world affects one's worldview and how distractions limit one's growth in the kingdom of God. Furthermore, the kingdoms of earth provide no lasting security for its members.

According to Paul K. Moser, Daniel 2:44 describes the kingdoms of earth as God-opposing powers that God promises to soon terminate through His kingdom.⁵⁴ Moser points out Luke 17:20-21, which identifies that upon Christ's arrival on earth, the transcendental kingdom of God became manifest, so the defeat of worldly kingdoms is already at hand. The final destruction of worldly kingdoms comes to pass when God's transcendent and spiritual (divine) kingdoms come together on Christ's second coming. The second coming is the harvest described in the parable of *the wheat the tares* from Matthew 13:39-43. The harvest which "will be at the end of the age" will be executed by the divine kingdom, bringing only those who are of the wheat with it, leaving the weeds of the kingdoms of earth to crumble.⁵⁵ Therefore, the only kingdom that will produce any eternal profit for man is the Kingdom of God.

Transition to the Kingdom of God

Growth in the kingdom is slow-moving for those attentive to, and therefore distracted by, the world. As much as it is true that man was first born into the world, it is not in the world that man is to flourish. M. Thomas Thangaraj makes it clear that it is only in Christ that a person can flourish, mentioning John 16:6, which identifies Jesus Christ as the only *way*.⁵⁶ Texts used in this section discuss that God expects man to make a transformation that begins with his redemption

⁵⁴ Paul K. Moser, "Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker: Gatekeeper for a Co-Owned Dual Kingdom," *Biblical theology bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2020): 216, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146107920959000>.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 218.

⁵⁶ M. Thomas Thangaraj, "Jesus the Christ—the Only Way to God and to Human Flourishing," *Journal of ecumenical studies* 52, no. 1 (2017), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2017.0010>.

by Jesus Christ, and a related trigger that inspires a desire to move out of the world into Christ. Curtis J. Young explains that this transformation motivation (trigger) is by design: "The deepest motivation of the person, both as a result of God's design in creation and the Spirit's work in redemption, is to thrive and flourish in fellowship with God."⁵⁷ Young helps the counselor and the counselee understand that transformational change is not just a desired outcome; it is a built-in mechanism for change that inspires one to set transformative goals and provides for the willingness to reach them.

James Bryan Smith helps one move the conversation of built-in transformational desire to intentional redemption. Smith brings to the table the reality that man is designed to, and redeemed for, admission to God's kingdom. One of the conditions that pastors, counselors, and mentors must overcome in the minds of their members, counselees, and disciples is the overwhelming belief that man can take down the kingdom of God. As much as it is not possible, many Christians in crisis still believe their deeds or experiences have caused the kingdom to crumble at their feet. Smith provides some help with understanding that as unfathomable as it may seem, man has not destroyed the kingdom: "It sounds insane and impossible. But the kingdom of God is unshaken (Hebrews 12:28)."⁵⁸ With all man has done to destroy the kingdom, it stands strong because it is of God, not of man.

Jeremy Treat explains just how powerful the kingdom of God is and why. He asserts that kingdom life is possible because it is promised by Jesus Christ, who is fully capable. As the Lord of the kingdom, He can fully defend it from any evil that the world might try to use to destroy it.

⁵⁷ Curtis J. Young, "Transformational Learning in Ministry," *Christian education journal* 10, no. 2 (2013): 131, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/073989131301000205>.

⁵⁸ Smith, 45.

Treat clarifies that the kingdom is in the here and now and is a place of eternal life, resulting from His death and resurrection.⁵⁹ Treat includes valuable information to help build the understanding that kingdom life is distinct from the lifestyles the world has to offer. It has already been established that worldly life comes naturally to one's flesh and provides no lasting hope, peace, or joy. Treat helps show that because of God's grace and a personal invitation to join and grow in Him, the kingdom life is where hope, peace, and joy are possible. This helps set the stage for teaching that, in the kingdom, a new Christian will develop a new value system and move from the world's morals to a spiritual conversion in God.⁶⁰ The same is true for the Christian living too deeply in the world. The most critical question about transformation in the kingdom may be related to how one realizes that kingdom life may be better.

It is common knowledge that God invites people to choose Him through His Word, but for most people, the biblical invitation is not enough to drive them away from the desires of their flesh. Even those who have made a decision for Christ sometimes need something to inspire radical change in their lives. Curtis J. Young explains how transformative learning helps move one from worldly thinking to finding value in transitioning to kingdom living. He believes one can experience kingdom transformation simply because of a learned kingdom perspective. He believes such a perspective becomes ingrained because of profound changes in people's "beliefs, values, commitments, and conduct."⁶¹ Such a change represents a cognitive transformation based only on information taken in, not inspired by the spirit. He explains that the motivation

⁵⁹ Treat, 62.

⁶⁰ Anton ten Klooster, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand!" (Mt 3:1 and 4:17): Conversion in the Gospel and the Christian Life," *Journal of moral theology* 10, no. Special Issue 1 (2021): 65, <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com>. Emphasis mine.

⁶¹ Young 323.

causing such a profound desire to change one's thinking is most often based on trauma or emotional dilemma that brings into question their existing concept of reality.

Young explains that transition into the kingdom always requires one to have heard the Lord's call, receive the Good News of something almost unbelievable, and realize their thinking is flawed. The first two components are understood to have already happened for this research. Young helps by identifying that the kingdom is a place that exists outside of one's concept of self. He helps show that when one's thinking is associated with their life in the world, it is flawed, but when one reconciles with the fact that their way of thinking is flawed, transition into kingdom thinking is possible. The shortfall in Young's transitional concept is that he does not expound on the necessary activity of the Lord following one's hearing of His call. The strength in his teaching is that although hope is possible only because of the provision of God, one must become aware of that provision to recognize the hope in it.

Annegret Benson explains what happens to one's thinking as they progress from their moment of salvation into the kingdom of God: "The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and the fact you are born again means this spiritual kingdom has an effect on your spirit, body, and soul; and a large impact on every part of your Christian life."⁶² How much of an effect depends on the effort of the Christian. Benson contributes to this research by providing a foundation for which parts of the person transform into the kingdom life. She explains that every aspect of oneself must, and will, transform into the kingdom life.

⁶² Dr. Annegret Benson, *Welcome to the Kingdom of God*, vol. Book, Whole (Chicago, IL: Total Publishing, 2019, 2019), 12.

Living the Kingdom Life

The church and the kingdom are not synonymous, but the church is where kingdom people gather to prepare through worship and learning to take God's message to those outside of it.⁶³ Gerald Goldman identifies what people see when they meet kingdom dwellers: "The kingdom of God is a world of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, where all humanity and creation are given dignity and respect, and are embraced in love and with joy."⁶⁴ Goldman is helpful in establishing that there is a difference between life in the world and kingdom life. He also supports the idea that the world sees those living in God's kingdom as different. Kingdom dwellers are, as mentioned, peaceful, just, forgiving, loving, accommodating, and respectful, and those mature kingdom dwellers not only live in joy but are driven by it.

Goldman does not mention what it is like for a new kingdom dweller, which is where Dallas Willard comes in. Living the kingdom life is work, and does not come easily for a new Christian or a Christian who has not yet settled exclusively into the kingdom of God. As previously mentioned, God is powerful. Even though every Christian is to be a laborer in the kingdom, one's best work is done when he yields to the power of God. Willard explains that, in the kingdom, transformational work is a cooperative process between man and God. Transformation is not accomplished by man's effort but by his willingness to allow God to work in him. It is about the synergy between God, who desires to change the man, and a man who

⁶³ Goldman 9.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 3.

desires to be more like his King.⁶⁵ The overall relative message in Willard's comments is that kingdom dwellers intentionally allow God to be the power that transforms them.

From the first moment of commitment to God, that moment when spiritual transformation into the kingdom begins, grace abounds. Smith explains what happens when one recognizes God's work in them as grace in action. He explains that the person growing in the kingdom comes to expect and learns to rely on God's action in every area of their life.⁶⁶

Realizing that God is involved and experiencing His continuous presence informs the heart and mind that they are not alone regardless of the world's attacks. Smith's work helps identify the benefit of God being active and available to Christians. This research benefits from Smith's explanation that God is available to Christians in every aspect of living and has no limits to his availability. Furthermore, Smith helps one understand that they are never alone in the kingdom and can count on God walking with them through every aspect of their life.

It will be necessary to teach that once one reacts to "the call" and enters a relationship with their ever-present God, they must allow Him to change them into kingdom thinkers. They must learn to let God move them in the direction He wants them to go. R. Scott Pace helps accomplish the teaching of necessary change when he says: "God's calling on our lives should also produce a drastic change."⁶⁷ Pace leads the way for understanding an important message that pastors, counselors, and mentors must express to those they help. If their condition is caused by deliberate or neglectful rebellious sin, transformation into one's thinking and living out of a

⁶⁵ Dallas Willard et al., *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, vol. Book, Whole (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2016), 67. <https://go.exlibris.link/fICcJkMY>.

⁶⁶ Smith, 31.

⁶⁷ R. Scott Pace, *Answering God's Call: Finding, Following, and Fulfilling God's Will for Your Life* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2020, 2020), 11.

kingdom lifestyle will be evident to them and onlookers as an outcome of counseling.⁶⁸ Not that the transformation process will be vividly apparent, but that their lifestyle will represent kingdom thinking and the behavior it influences.

The key to Pace's position is that even those adjusting away from the most egregious social and behavioral conditions (sins) can accomplish quality change in the Lord. Pace reports that change always follows one's response to God's calling, and it is always significant. One's calling [if accepted] changes from rebellion and indulgence to a refined trajectory. One's motivations, purpose, and even destination are altered upon submission to their calling. Pace completes the message that God is always available, capable, and seeking to make positive changes in those who enter His kingdom. God is always present and is always ready to show one the way to His kingdom and the lifestyle that results from its influence.

For individuals learning about the kingdom of God, there is more to know than just that they and God are in the kingdom. Kingdom life is not limited only to a relationship with the King and the resulting change. Kingdom life also affects how one interacts with other kingdom dwellers. Inhabitants of the kingdom include Christian husbands, wives, children, pastors, bosses, widows, orphans, and neighbors. The kingdom life is not a life lived alone. Pace describes the kingdom life as more than a one-on-one endeavor. "When Jesus invites us to follow him, it is not simply a decision to receive eternal life and forgiveness for our sins. He invites us to learn from him, specifically his humility of heart (Matt 11:28–29), so that we might embrace his same disposition."⁶⁹ As mentioned previously, kingdom dwellers are identifiable by their behavior, and according to Pace, that is possible because they are acting like Jesus Christ. Pace

⁶⁸ Pace, 11.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 13.

reinforces the idea that God’s plan includes actively learning from Jesus Christ how to serve others, identifying that there is no selfishness in the kingdom dweller’s life but only love and giving.

Robby Gallaty explains that Christians are to be “set apart” from the sinful world and serve Christ who reigns over the kingdom in which they live.⁷⁰ Gallaty identifies that service to the kingdom means helping others find and thrive in it. “When we obey His commandments and follow His ways, the kingdom advances. We make disciples the same way. Jesus’s final words: “teaching them to obey all I’ve commanded them” encapsulates that.”⁷¹ Following that logic helps one understand that living the kingdom life includes helping others to do the same. Kingdom dwellers want to share the kingdom and its associated lifestyle with others.

Prayer and Flourishing

From a scientific perspective, Melanie L. McEntee et al. explain that the ability to possess hope, love, and joy, among other things, is indicative of spiritual, emotional, and social maturity.⁷² People living in the world are known to deal with constant chaos, but for those involved in prayer, there is contentment and a sense of someone bigger than them at work in their life. There is a direct correlation between the experience of prayer fulfillment and flourishing. For those experiencing prayer fulfillment, increasing feelings of wholeness, peace, inner strength, and emotional stability lead to greater spiritual growth.⁷³

⁷⁰ Robby Gallaty, *Here and Now: Thriving in the Kingdom of Heaven Today*, vol. Book, Whole (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2019, 2019), 102. <https://go.exlibris.link/2Ys1x8dH>.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 118.

⁷² Melanie L. McEntee, Gabriel S. Dy-Liacco, and Deborah G. Haskins, "Human Flourishing: A Natural Home for Spirituality," *Journal of spirituality in mental health* 15, no. 3 (2013): 143-44, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2013.799410>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 153.

James C. Wilhoit identifies mindfulness as “knowing what we are doing while we are doing it.”⁷⁴ He and John Coe collectively identify that Christian contemplative prayer, which is a prayer done intentionally, with attention to detail, and with the understanding that God is present, elevates mindfulness.⁷⁵ Considering conditional mindfulness, combined with Christian contemplative prayer, one can identify that the prayer has a strong perspective of the subject, purpose, and response to their prayers. In a recent study, Kathleen C. McCulloch, and Elizabeth J. Parks-Stamm, asked a portion of their research subjects to think about a personal situation and asked the rest of the participants to pray about a personal situation.⁷⁶ The results showed that those who prayed were more at peace and had a better perspective on their situation than those who only thought about it.

By having a better perspective on their situation, problem, or condition, those who engage in prayer can better mitigate negative responses and reach quality resolutions. Those who pray about a specific condition can better evaluate it, use self-control to affect their response, and experience quality outcomes; however, confidence powers self-control. By one’s belief that they possess such an ability to execute self-control, they will function to overcome temptation; but when the associated confidence diminishes, so does the ability to resist.⁷⁷

This dissertation mentions that hope is usually domain-specific; however, according to Malte Friese and Michaela Wänke, the strength to resist temptation is not domain-specific. They

⁷⁴ James C. Wilhoit, "Contemplative and Centering Prayer," *Journal of spiritual formation and soul care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 109-13, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700110>.

⁷⁵ John Coe, "The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution," *ibid.* (<https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/193979091400700112>).

⁷⁶ Kathleen C. McCulloch, and Elizabeth J. Parks-Stamm, "Reaching Resolution: The Effect of Prayer on Psychological Perspective and Emotional Acceptance," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 12, no. 2 (2020): 257, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rel0000234>.

⁷⁷ Malte Friese, and Michaela Wänke, "Personal Prayer Buffers Self-Control Depletion," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 51 (2014), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.11.006>.

report that it is a domain-independent resource that supplies the power to have sustained self-control.⁷⁸ They identify that those who suppress their feelings on a subject and then try to exercise self-control tend to become depleted of the power to remain in control of their responses.⁷⁹ They also reported that those who expressed their emotions through prayer were more likely to sustain control of their responses. By staying in control and having the ability to recognize their condition and identify strategies to achieve goal attainment, those who pray are more likely to flourish in life.

Hope's Function in Counseling

According to Thomas M. Edwards and Aliona Javanovskil: "Hope is inextricably linked to the human condition. Be it a virtue or a psychological construct, hope has the general characteristic of being a motivator for positive change in people's lives, even when personal circumstances appear daunting."⁸⁰ According to Theodore T. Bartholomew, it is a nearly universal understanding in Christian counseling that hope motivates people to accept the work associated with adjustment.⁸¹ Hope has become one of the main ingredients in the successful application of well-known counseling approaches like Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and

⁷⁸ Friese, and Wänke, 56.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁰ Thomas M. Edwards, and Aliona Jovanovski, "Hope as a Therapeutic Target in Counselling – in General and in Relation to Christian Clients," *International journal for the advancement of counselling* 38, no. 2 (2016): 77, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10447-016-9257-8>.

⁸¹ Theodore T. Bartholomew, Eileen E. Joy, and Brittany E. Gundel, "Clients' Hope for Counseling as a Predictor of Outcome in Psychotherapy," *The Counseling psychologist* (2021): 1127, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00110000211033255>.

Solution-focused Brief Therapy (SFBT).⁸² Matthew W. Gallagher et al. identifies hope as a particularly relevant component of CBT, revealing that hope predicts improvement in counselee adjustment from anxiety, depression, and purpose devaluation.⁸³

Marie-Carmen Neipp and Mark Beyebach identify SFBT as most effective when the therapist and counselee consider past counselee successes when co-constructing solutions, implying the value of hope in the process.⁸⁴ Jolize Joubert and Tharina Guse explain that SFBT facilitates hope as counselor and counselee collaborate on goal setting and future-casting, while focusing specifically on the counselee's identifiable strengths.⁸⁵ Anao Zhang et al. identify that the SFBT approach relies on hope to effect change.⁸⁶ They also refer to SFBT as a strength-based approach where counselees search within themselves for personal resources, identify prior successes, and set goals based on their perceived hope for future success. They explain that SFBT considers future possibilities without dwelling on past struggles.

⁸² Denise J. Larsen, and Rachel Stege, "Client Accounts of Hope in Early Counseling Sessions: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of counseling and development* 90, no. 1 (2012): 45, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-6676.2012.00007.x>.

⁸³ Matthew W. Gallagher et al., "Examining Hope as a Transdiagnostic Mechanism of Change across Anxiety Disorders and Cbt Treatment Protocols," *Behavior therapy* 51, no. 1 (2020): 192, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2019.06.001>.

⁸⁴ Marie-Carmen Neipp, and Mark Beyebach, "The Global Outcomes of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: A Revision," *The American journal of family therapy* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (2022), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2022.2069175>.

⁸⁵ Jolize Joubert, and Tharina Guse, "Implementing Solution-Focused Brief Therapy to Facilitate Hope and Subjective Well-Being among South African Trauma Survivors: A Case Study," *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 22, no. 1 (2022), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/capr.12416>.

⁸⁶ Anao Zhang et al., "Solution-Focused Brief Therapy for Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Patients in China: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial," *Journal of psychosocial oncology* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07347332.2021.1931627>.

Counselor and Lay Helper Resilience

What is not given much consideration in literature is how hope affects the helper. Just as hope is essential for counselee confidence, it is also true that a counselor's expectation for potential positive outcomes establishes a sense of counselor efficacy. Without this sense of hope for positive client adjustment in areas where the counselor believes they are effective, they can become apprehensive about engaging in a counselor/client relationship. Likewise, counselors already engaged with clients are likely to terminate sessions if they recognize hindrances to adjustment, with no apparent hope of positively affecting outcomes.⁸⁷

For professional and pastoral counselors, there is a strong correlation between hope and resilience. Hope relies on the counselor's self-efficacy, confidence in potential program outcomes, and ability to bounce back from helping experiences that cause them emotional imbalance or empathetic distress. Simone Lambert and Gerald Lawson report that counselors working with victims of Hurricane Katrina after August 29, 2005, suffered burnout, secondary post-traumatic response from vicarious trauma experiences, and compassion fatigue.⁸⁸ Hurricane Katrina was a substantial natural disaster, and the level of helper response may seem too substantial to consider in the context of lay helper training. However, Lambert and Lawson's study shows that when tragic human experiences occur, even trained professional responders can suffer diminished resilience.

⁸⁷ Wendy Edey, and Ronna F. Jevne, "Hope, Illness, and Counselling Practice: Making Hope Visible," *Canadian journal of counselling* 37, no. 1 (2003): 44, <https://go.exlibris.link/V3jLg29k>.

⁸⁸ Simone F. Lambert, and Gerard Lawson, "Resilience of Professional Counselors Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," *Journal of counseling and development* 91, no. 3 (2013), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00094.x>.

Church leadership should not expect as much resilience in lay helpers as professionals, considering their lack of preparation and training in the helping services. Unprepared lay helpers attending to those with emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles can expect to become burned out or experience compassion fatigue more quickly than trained counselors. Like the novice counselors identified in an article by Faith Aydin and Hatice Odaci, lay helpers supporting traumatized individuals can expect little resistance to vicarious trauma experiences. They will, therefore, likely suffer high levels of anxiety.⁸⁹ Byeolbee Um and Gerta Bardhoshi explain that burnout usually stems from emotional struggles, self-doubt, and feelings of counseling futility for counselors-in-training.⁹⁰ Lay helpers whose primary service area in the church is not related to helping can be compared to counseling students. Lay helpers may have a desire or compulsion to help those suffering, but have not received the training necessary to be considered prepared for the job.

Suhyun Suh et al. postulate that for a person to be able to perform a task well, they must first believe they are capable of doing so.⁹¹ They cite research that indicates that counselors who believe they possess quality skills are more likely to trust their capabilities and that those with high levels of relative self-efficacy are better equipped to handle difficult cases. Furthermore, they identify that supervision and training, among other things, predict higher levels of counselor

⁸⁹ Fatih Aydin, and Hatice Odaci, "Life Satisfaction of Counsellor Supervisees: The Role of Counselling Self-Efficacy, Trait Anxiety and Trait Hope," *British journal of guidance & counselling* 49, no. 5 (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2020.1853039>.

⁹⁰ Byeolbee Um, and Gerta Bardhoshi, "Demands, Resources, Meaningful Work, and Burnout of Counselors-in-Training," *Counselor education and supervision* 61, no. 2 (2022), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12232>.

⁹¹ Suhyun Suh et al., "A Cross-Cultural Study of the Self-Confidence of Counselors-in-Training," *International journal for the advancement of counselling* 40, no. 3 (2018): 257, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10447-018-9324-4>.

self-efficacy. Conversely, low self-confidence is a predictor of diminished job satisfaction and eventual exhaustion. Merrian Brooks et al., reporting on a study of lay counselors, identified that higher levels of confidence were reported after those participants with only minimal training received a post-training booster class.⁹² They conclude their article with an assertion that any structured lay counseling effort must include an ongoing regular training program that focuses on the organization's particular needs.

Prayer and Hope

Prayer has two influences; the human influence that focuses on lacking and the spiritual influence that focuses on what one has gained in Christ. Gerrit Immink explains that the act of prayer conducted by man relies on a concrete understanding of his condition and needs, and that prayer itself is a religious act used to communicate with God.⁹³ Immink identifies that for the person praying, there can be no separation between the act of praying and the prayer's understanding of God's absolute power and ability to provide. David R. Paine and Steven J. Sandage identify a positive correlation between spirituality and hope, with prayer being the open conduit to God.⁹⁴ He explains that the prayer may lack faith, which diminishes hopefulness for one experiencing emotional turmoil that leads to spiritual instability. Paine and Sandage identify that the fear of being abandoned by God exacerbates their spiritual instability. Finally, they

⁹² Merrian Brooks et al., "Young Adult Lay Counselors Experience with Lay Counseling," *Journal of adolescent health* 68, no. 2S (2021): 71, <https://go.exlibris.link/tsT2D10R>.

⁹³ Gerrit Immink, "The Sense of God's Presence in Prayer," *Hervormde theologiese studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.4122>.

⁹⁴ David R. Paine, and Steven J. Sandage, "More Prayer, Less Hope: Empirical Findings on Spiritual Instability," *Journal of spirituality in mental health* 17, no. 4 (2015), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2015.1026429>.

identify that one who prays in faith with an expectation of God's response is more likely to remain hopeful than one who has doubts.

David Seal adds to the conversation of hope in prayer by identifying that prayer is a divine experience where the petitioner is actually in the presence of God. He recognizes God's immediate response to prayer as God being present at the very moment of prayer.⁹⁵ Veto Etienne reinforces the assertion that in prayer, one is in the presence of God. He explains that ". . . the nature of prayer, which is not an extension of our desire, but entering into the, will, life and relations of "another" – a divine other."⁹⁶ For one praying without ceasing in the 1 Thessalonians 5:17 way, they can be confident that they are not only a part of the temporal kingdom of God, but also actively connected to the spiritual kingdom of God.

As mentioned, God's children pray to him, knowing he has the power to provide for their needs. It is, however, in the intentional doing of prayer that one finds power. Prayer has the ability to reach God by transcending the temporal realm of God known as the kingdom on earth into the spiritual realm of God. When one is in prayer with God, they experience the full value of the intimacy of their relationship with the divine God of heaven. Fear and instability give way to peace and hope when one is in a state of prayer. Furthermore, when hope abounds in the kingdom, those who are a part of the kingdom flourish.

Conclusion

The researcher intended to discover if a bridge or method of transition exists between the type of prayer that is explicitly purposed to help one develop intimacy with God, to a more

⁹⁵ David Seal, "Prayer as Divine Experience and Empathetic Identification in 2 Baruch: 2 Baruch 48:1–25 as a Test Case," *Studies in Religion* 48, no. 4 (2019): 638-39, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0008429819844495>.

⁹⁶ Rev Dr Etienne Veto, "'Praying in the Holy Spirit" Spirituality and Pneumatology," *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1068 (2016), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12195>.

focused kingdom life or lifestyle. The literature review attempts to evaluate current sources and one relevant source outside of a ten-year window that discusses the value of intimate prayer, kingdom life, and how an intervention based on prayer and hope aids in resilience and effectiveness in counseling. The sources are collectively considered to identify in what areas they agree. By conducting the literature review in such a way as to identify relative agreement between the sources in nine specific areas that pertain to the purpose of this research project, this research can determine if currently available research adequately addresses the project purpose identified herein.

There exists no disagreement between the sources concerning the areas considered, which are 1.) Intimacy with the God of the Kingdom, 2.) Christians Living in the Kingdoms of Earth, 3.) Transition to the Kingdom of God, 4.) Living the Kingdom Life, 5.) Intimacy with God through Prayer, 6) Prayer and Flourishing, 7) Hope's Function in Counseling, 8) Counselor and Lay Helper Resilience, 9) Prayer and Hope. The agreement between the texts is likely due to the commonality of their religious perspectives. All sources discovered in the research process are written by researchers or authors who approach their subject based on Christian values. An intertwining of subject matter also causes most of the texts to be interrelated. Although there is agreement among the texts as mentioned, there is no strong bridge between intentional prayer and one's development in the kingdom.

The project at hand will take the work of these great authors and researchers to the next level. They all agree that the kingdom's inhabitants are God as King and those over whom the King rules. They identify in detail what is different about kingdom-dwellers and what is expected of them. The most powerful message is that people must seek to become more like Christ. Likewise, the literature survey on prayer provides excellent detail on personal

development and intimacy with the Lord. However, it does not establish a strong argument regarding how prayer can be used as an intentional tool for moving one from the world's struggles to the hope, peace, safety, and joy of the kingdom of God.

Theological Foundations

The basic premise of this action research project is based on one of the final instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 5:17 tells of Christ's commandment that man must pray without ceasing.⁹⁷ Christ expects his people to live every minute of every day with Him in a running conversation of fellowship, knowing that no subject, place, or condition is off-limits.⁹⁸ Adam Clark takes Christ's commandment to be more than just conversation, by identifying that for good to come about, constant fellowship with God is a necessity: "Ye are dependent on God for every good; without Him ye can do nothing; feel that dependence at all times, and ye will always be in the spirit of prayer; and those who feel this spirit will, as frequently as possible, participate in the exercise of prayer."⁹⁹

In Clarke's statement, he acknowledges a feeling of dependence established via an ongoing relationship with the Lord. The more one prays to God in relationship and seeking; the more one realizes God's ability to move them in the direction of His will. Chapter 6 of The Book of Matthew establishes a framework for seeking God in willing dependency. In his commentary on Matthew 6:19-34, Matthew Henry explains that on earth is both man's heart and worldly

⁹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the King James Bible.

⁹⁸ David Guzik, *1-2 Thessalonians: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2013), 83.

⁹⁹ Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Holy Bible: Abridged from the Original Six-Volume Work*, vol. Book, Whole (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 9401. <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/>.

treasure, and if left to his own will, man will seek those earthly treasures instead of looking to God for His provision.¹⁰⁰ Marius J. Nel explains that even knowing that the Lord will replace what they give up with 100 times more valuable provisions, many will not abandon what the world has to offer to receive the Lord's exclusive provision.¹⁰¹ Henry explains that man, acting outside the influence of the kingdom of God, will attend to his perceived needs to the point of frustration and even torment.¹⁰² However, God, speaking of all that man truly needs, tells him who listens to seek the kingdom before anything else, and God will provide all he needs. According to Jesus, as spoken through Matthew 19:29, His provision even includes everlasting life.

A Message from Peter

By extension, people who seek solutions to emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development problems from sources outside God's kingdom, such as from within themselves or by seeking secular helpers, also suffer dissatisfaction and even emotional and spiritual torment. According to Scripture, there will be emotional suffering even, if not especially, for Christians. Peter's first letter to the scattered Christians of his time speaks to everyone in their own time regarding suffering. First Peter 5:10 finds Peter praying for the elect, especially the young ones, that they will have to suffer for a time, but that through Christ they will persevere. Matthew Henry acknowledges that man lacks the ability to persevere without Christ, but that through

¹⁰⁰ Henry, Matthew chap. 6.

¹⁰¹ Marius Nel, "The Renouncement of Possessions According to Matthew 19:16-30," *Hervormde teologiese studies* 71, no. 1 (2015), <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2928>.

¹⁰² Henry, Matthew chap. 6.

persistent prayer and dependence on God's promises, He who is grace will settle them into a peaceful condition.¹⁰³

First Peter 5:7 tells of the Lord's attentiveness in even the smallest of his children's interests or burdens.¹⁰⁴ Whatever affects His children also affects Him; if one of His children is afflicted, He is also afflicted and is willing to bear both the child and the burden. However, the burden must be cast to the Lord for this promise to be realized. The burdened party requires an action, and that action is no small task. This concept of casting is similar to the effort required of a net fisher. Like a burden, the net that a fisherman casts is heavy and difficult to manage. The fisherman must use great force to cast his net for it to reach its destination and not get pushed back by the water's current. People are to cast their burdens on the Lord in this same way, with great intention and energy.¹⁰⁵

Casting in prayer also requires great faith. Faith that God not only hears man's prayers but that He actually desires to hear from His children regarding their burdens. One must have faith that God cares for him and is capable and willing to correct that which suits His will. When a person understands that God is mighty enough to handle anything he can throw at Him and that God is glorified when one trusts Him with his burden, man will willingly seek the safety of God's kingdom.¹⁰⁶ The act of engaging God in faithful and intentional prayer to move through

¹⁰³ Henry, 1 Peter chap 5.

¹⁰⁴ Clarke, 10108.

¹⁰⁵ David Guzik, *James and 1 & 2 Peter: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2013), 145.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 145-46.

one's burdens to a place of grace in God's kingdom is representative of the concept of Living Prayer.

The Apostle Paul Listens to God and Realizes Results

Those previously mentioned, those who tend to look inward or to the world to see their burdens addressed, consistently fail to experience the relieving experience that accompanies the hope found in God. Those who do not hear from God what they want to hear will eventually lose their desire and ability to hear Him.¹⁰⁷ In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul shows what it looks like when a man is incapable of recognizing the sufficiency of Christ. Paul did not consider His need for the Lord until he was faced with his own insufficiency. When a person faces their inability to resolve burdens, they must decide whether or not to seek the Lord for His ability to provide resolution. Otherwise, one will continue to experience the suffering and hopelessness associated with the burden. For Paul, the burden was a condition he called a thorn in his flesh; a heavy burden from which he wanted to be released.

Paul concocted a resolution to his problem that he would take to the Lord three times. Paul's request was simple; he just wanted the Lord to remove the thorn from his flesh. The problem with his request is that, in his desperation, Paul does not consider God's will. In response to Paul's requests, God does as God will when asked to take the lead; He tells Paul that he is weak, but that God's grace is sufficient in his weakness.¹⁰⁸ Paul immediately reacts to God's proclamation and allows Him to work in his weakness to bring about the strength God wants to establish in him. The infirmity is not lifted, but because Paul hears and submits to God's

¹⁰⁷ David Guzik, *2 Corinthians: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2013), 168.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:9

response, he learns to take pleasure in the infirmities, distress, persecutions, and reproaches that the world throws at him. Paul finds himself strong because of his complete, and likely forced, dependence on God's grace and strength.¹⁰⁹ By expressing his burden to God and allowing God to show him how to live with it, or because of it, Paul served God's kingdom in a way that glorified Him. Prayer moved Paul from where He thought he should be, to where God wanted him.

Kingdom Lifestyle

To establish the concept of kingdom living, one must first realize that there is a contrasting lifestyle that does not consider the will of God and is, therefore, corrupt. Within each lifestyle, there is a way of thinking that regulates behavior, and thanks to the fall of man, worldly thinking is the starting point for everyone born into the world. Romans 12:2 does, by implication, identify that worldly thinking is not acceptable to God. Therefore, by extension, a worldly lifestyle represents behavior outside God's will. To be in God's will, one must seek to discern what is good and acceptable to Him and behave accordingly.

Romans 12:2 calls Christians, who, by birth, must be present in the place of the world, to not allow the world to have control of them, at any level. The implications of Romans 12:2 is that even Christians are regularly tempted by popular culture and are subject to rebellious thoughts that can drive them to corrupt behaviors.¹¹⁰ When one loses their concentration on the effort of Christian transformation and gets distracted from their focus on kingdom thinking, personal corruption moves them to opposite thinking and behavior, no matter how seemingly

¹⁰⁹ Guzik, *2 Corinthians: Verse by Verse Commentary*, 171-72.

¹¹⁰ David Guzik, *Romans: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2013), 152.

minor. If left unchecked, their lack of focus on kingdom thinking will move them farther and farther from the kingdom lifestyle.

When properly focused, a kingdom lifestyle first acts to transform the individual toward becoming like Christ. Ephesians 5:1-5 provides for the foundational standards a kingdom dweller must meet. Christians of the kingdom of God are to walk in love as they seek to imitate Christ, who gave Himself as a sacrifice for their sin. Kingdom dwellers are to understand themselves as ever-developing saints and must behave accordingly. Instead of participating in, or being influenced by immorality, foolishness, fornication, obscenity, lust, or covetousness, they should give thanks for the opportunity to love like Jesus Christ. Paul gives more detailed information regarding how a Christian is to think and behave throughout the balance of Ephesians 5 & 6.

Romans 12:2 explains that while God's powerful involvement is correcting a person's thinking, a behavioral change will be evident to those who see them in a social context. As much as it is difficult for human beings to represent the good of God, they should, through their attitudes and behavior, strive to let the perfect will of God show through the way they think and live. Living as a person aspiring to think like the Lord represents one seeking to live a kingdom lifestyle.

The Practicality of Living Prayer for the Helper

According to John 15:1-9, Jesus, instructing the disciples how to live life after He is gone, teaches the value of remaining connected to Him. In verses 15:4-5, Jesus makes it clear that without a solid inseverable connection to Him, the branch, which refers to Christian servants, cannot produce the results God intends. God provides His followers with the gifts they need to serve Him, but without a relational bond, like that between a vine and its branches, the ability to produce them is impossible. In verses 15:7-8, Jesus identifies that those who are

connected to Him, as the branch is to the vine, know Him well and therefore know what to ask of Him. It is the one who is so connected, knowledgeable, and in communication with Him that Jesus calls his disciples.

It is clear then that to use the gifts the Lord gives to minister to others; the ministering individual must work in communion with God. Living with God is the only way to convert the gifts He gives to the fruits He intends. F.B. Meyer explains that God actually needs his followers to act if He is to have the ability to bless man as He desires.¹¹¹ Because of his life with God and his knowledge of God's word, the servant minister knows to pray for God's guidance. Because the servant is connected to the Lord through informed Living Prayer, the Lord promises to do through His servant as the servant asks. (John 15:7b) Following this theology, the practicality of Living Prayer for the helper is that through it, God manages the gifts He gives to produce the outcomes for which the gifts were given.

Living Prayer is considered a tool for engaging God to move from one place in life to another and from a worldly mindset to a kingdom mindset. It is also necessary for the helper. If the servant helper is to help one suffering to move in the direction of God's blessings, the helper must intentionally engage with God, so that God can exploit the gifts He has given him for that purpose. According to Mark 11:23-24, Jesus spoke of His desire for His followers to understand that all change is possible through faith. Matthew Henry explains that all Christians possess the [gift of] faith to move mountains.¹¹²

¹¹¹ F. B. Meyer, *Through the Bible Day by Day: A Devotional Commentary*, vol. Book, Whole (Philadelphia, PA: American Sunday-School Union, 1914). <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com>.

¹¹² Henry.

According to Jamieson, R, et al., Jesus was likely not referring to the possibility that one can move an actual mountain through faithful prayer, but that there is no actual condition or intention of the world that can interrupt the advancement of His kingdom.¹¹³ Henry identifies specifically that the things a mountain-moving faith in prayer can affect are mountains of guilt and corruption and that it can even extinguish Satan's fiery darts. The saying, *moving mountains*, was often used in the Jewish community during the time of Jesus's ministry to denote overcoming the most significant obstacles or difficulties.¹¹⁴

Jesus was initially speaking to His disciples, who were to serve as missionaries and evangelists. However, the message to all servant helpers is that whether the prayer is made as a general request for proficient use of the gifts God provides or for the ability to help a brother overcome the worst the world has to offer, the helper can count on God's marvelous ability to respond to any prayer made in faith. Robert Jamieson et al. explain that the prayer efforts Jesus is talking about in Mark 11:23-24 were presented to the disciples because it would be a concept specifically needed through the missions of evangelistic and missionary types. Such are those who serve as pastors, counselors, missionaries, and lay helpers. Those servants who must believe in the sufficiency of God to do their kingdom work, and express God's message to the troubled and lost, that He is sufficient in all circumstances and conditions. Not only is it valuable for helpers to teach Living Prayer; they must employ it and beseech God's help in preparing them to serve using the gifts He has provided, and they can do so with confidence.

¹¹³ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments.*, vol. Book, Whole (Hartford, CN: The S.S. Scranton Company, 1873). <https://go.exlibris.link/ZQKQdxJZ>.

¹¹⁴ David Guzik, *Mark: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2013), 163.

Theoretical Foundations

It is the nature of Christians who are focused on the kingdom of God to direct fellow Christians and the lost to Jesus Christ, whether for introduction or correction. By God's grace, everyone in his kingdom is gifted, in one or more ways, to help others. These gifts carry with them the responsibility to share them with others. First Peter 4:10 says: "As every man hath received the gift, *even so* minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (KJV) Those who receive God's grace and are experienced receivers of His continuous provision of gifts are obliged to teach others. The effort of pastoral counseling is to be good stewards of the gifts received to minister to those suffering from conditions created by worldly thinking. Pastoral counselors seek to move them from a place of spiritual immaturity or confusion to the safety of the kingdom of God.

Spiritual Formation in Pastoral Counseling

Paul Pettit explains that God constantly calls on His children to get close to Him and become like the model Jesus Christ provided through His earthly life and ministry.¹¹⁵ One of the ways God transforms one into His image is by teaching them to move through their circumstances as He would. However, God knows that spiritual formation will be challenging for man, so He directs His children to not grieve the Holy Spirit with the stumblings of poor choices. Growth in God, which is spiritual formation, includes the frequent adjustments God must make in one's life to move them out of the conditions that grieve the Holy Spirit, which is where pastoral counseling enters, from time to time, the cycle of spiritual formation.

¹¹⁵ Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 18-23.

For Christians, how they approach spirituality has much to do with how they function in life. The more effort one puts into maintaining a solid connection to their spiritual or kingdom identity, the better their feelings of self-worth, life purpose, self-efficacy, and ability to flourish in love and personal development.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, one's ability to self-manage through stress conditions is directly related to the spiritual strength developed through surviving previous stress conditions.¹¹⁷ It follows that if one can self-adjust through the struggles and afflictions of life because of a solid spiritual bearing, they can also fall out of adjustment with a weak commitment to God. Therefore, one may need to be moved back into sync with the Lord and His kingdom by a Christian counselor to regain alignment with kingdom thinking.

For Christian and pastoral counselors, there is an overlap with the duties of pastors and teachers in the area of spiritual formation. The overlap is established because the church's pastoral leadership is responsible for member spiritual formation, while Christian and pastoral counselors help move struggling members back into alignment with their spiritual trajectory. It is understood that many counselors of the various counseling disciplines find it challenging to approach spirituality or spiritual formation because they are not knowledgeable about the many spiritual traditions embedded in their client base. However, there is only one spiritual concept to understand; Jesus Christ is King. When Christians fall out of sync with the kingdom of God, Christian and pastoral counselors can help clients or church members move back in sync with their spiritual formation activities.

¹¹⁶ Samuel T. Gladding, and Jamie E. Crockett, "Religious and Spiritual Issues in Counseling and Therapy: Overcoming Clinical Barriers," *Journal of spirituality in mental health* 21, no. 2 (2019): 154, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2018.1476947>.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 154. Gladding uses the word *coping* in his explanation on this subject.

Living Prayer

Prayer is a gift from God given to His children as a way of communicating in faith and appreciating the hope that accompanies it. As it relates to adjustment, prayer is a way of seeking God's help with those things that cause anxiety, and as previously mentioned, moves one toward a better thought process. This concept of prayer is identified in Philippians 4:6 as a device for seeking freedom from anxiety, communicating one's perceived needs, wants, and desires to God while expressing appreciation to Him. Guzik refers to the type of prayer activity undertaken if praying in the Philippians 4:6 way, as representing "a Living Prayer life."

In pastoral counseling, the concept of helping one overcome the effects of anxiety or moving out of the world's bonds and back into agreement with God might be considered life coaching. However, the discipline of life coaching is geared more toward helping one function better in their world. Therefore, this research will consider the type of prayer that moves one from the world's anxiety (or emotional issues), spiritual disequilibrium, relational dysfunction, or personal development struggles to a more focused kingdom lifestyle as *Living Prayer*.

Correction

Those who seek the counsel of pastors, pastoral counselors, and lay helpers are looking for a way to move from the place of anxiety, spiritual and relational dysfunction, and personal development struggles to relative liberty. Still, they are too often so caught up in their pain, anger, and confusion that they cannot see their way clearly enough to seek the real help they need. The counselor's job is to help them connect or reconnect with the reality of their condition or situation and identify a solution. The initial answer is always to connect them with the Lord, who knows their condition and the solution for moving them from where they are to peace and equilibrium with Him.

It is often disclosed to counselees that they will be the ones doing the work, but if they could correct their thinking and bad behavior on their own, they would adjust and not need counseling. Hebrews 13:3-14 lays out the truth of correction. For correction to be possible and lasting, God must bring it about. It is God who sanctifies affliction, turning the turmoil of the soul to peacefulness, making way for His righteousness to be lived out in the circumstances of the afflicted.¹¹⁸ The afflicted individual will be transformed by intentionally and continuously allowing God to change their reaction to emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles. Their transformation will change them from one who experiences frequent distress to one who more frequently adjusts toward God's righteousness. The more one intentionally gives their struggles over to God's righteousness; the more submission will become a habit of faith. Equipped with the faith that God will use their struggle to move them to his righteousness, the afflicted will adjust more quickly to, or back to, a more focused kingdom lifestyle.

Kingdom Lifestyle

God's kingdom is a place where He is King, His rule is absolute, and the blessings He provides are available today and tomorrow.¹¹⁹ Therefore, a kingdom lifestyle is one where a person knows God as King, accepts His absolute authority over them, and seeks to live with Him in receipt of His blessings for today and tomorrow. Pastors, counselors, and lay coaches lead people to the kingdom where they are called to serve God in the way He prescribes, with the unique talents and gifts He gives, for the purpose He specifically designates.¹²⁰ The concept is

¹¹⁸ Henry, Hebrews chap. 14.

¹¹⁹ Ladd, 24.

¹²⁰ Pace, 4.

that those led by God and not by worldly thinking will move away from world-driven anxiety and allow their relationship with the Lord to establish their relational style with others.

The depth of the individual's kingdom commitment will determine their resistance to the world. Willard et al. explain that life is a process of constant changes in relationships, suffering, goals, hopes and desires, and maturation.¹²¹ Although this research is not explicitly focused on the global concept of spiritual formation, correction requires one to seek a change to a personality that is committed to the world and transform their efforts to become more like Jesus Christ. Willard believes that such an effort is easier on the body and soul of an individual than for an individual who lives a life of disobedience.¹²² People who look to the world for the changes that provide hope and security believe they are taking the easy way. However, it is better to seek a commitment to God and a lifestyle of transformation in a kingdom of grace that provides hope and a promise of peace.

Living Prayer: A Choice

Functionally, Living Prayer is a method or tool for moving from one place to a place superior to the last. The decision recommended in this research is to move away from a chaotic way of living to a kingdom lifestyle rich in structure and hope. Humans have free will that provides an excellent opportunity to choose one way or another, listen to their head or heart, feel good and confused or struggle to be righteous, and live in the world or submit to the kingdom.

¹²¹ Willard et al., 144.

¹²² *ibid.*, 146.

Summed up, people live the way they do, not because an external force controls them, but because they have the power and authority to choose their lifestyle.¹²³

William Glasser, the developer of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy (CT/RT), believed that people are both responsible for their behavior and fully capable of choosing to improve them.¹²⁴ Living Prayer was born from this pastoral counselor's agreement with Glasser's theory that man has choices and is responsible for choosing his own way. Man's right or obligation to choose does not indicate a belief that God should not be in charge, but that it is up to man to allow God to influence his life. CT/RT operates on the belief that everything a person does, they do intentionally to cause the satisfaction of their perceived needs, regardless of what they are and how the perception developed.

The idea of perceived needs relates well to the concept of the heart's desire identified in Psalms 37:4. There is a difference between the desires or need perceptions that develop from worldly thinking and those derived from engagement with God. The world convinces people that they need the things of the world that cause confusion and chaos, while continuous engagement with the Lord of the kingdom changes one's need perceptions to those things God inspires. As such, the logical choice is the one that drives individuals to abandon confusion and chaos for the guidance of the One, who desires to provide a pathway to peace and is a gateway to hope.

Living Prayer: A Gateway to Hope

Constant faithful communication with the God of creation and eternity, who assures man of His intention and desire to be in full communion with them, is a practice that creates

¹²³ Patricia A. Robey, Robert E. Wubbolding, and Michelle Malter, "A Comparison of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy to Adlerian Individual Psychology," *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 73, no. 4 (2017): 283, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jip.2017.0024>.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 284.

continuous hope.¹²⁵ Romans 15:13 announces that God is not only the provider of hope but also the giver of joy and peace. Since God is from where joy, peace, and hope originate, there cannot be any such access to them outside of His kingdom. In apparent contrast to this position, Catherine M. Byrne and Deidre D. Morgan provide details from their study on hope in New Zealand, a nonreligious society, that people find hope in family, friends, and happy memories, among other things.¹²⁶ However, they also report enhanced hopefulness for those especially religious participants, suggesting that true hope indeed relies on God.

Furthermore, Byrne and Morgan's study reinforces the concept that hope is found in past positive faith, relationship, and emotional experiences, and that when one is thinking from a kingdom perspective, God makes the hope-filled recollections more vivid and valuable. Therefore, pastoral counselors and lay helpers best serve their counselees by helping them move from the thinking associated with the world to the kingdom, where Christ magnifies hope. Keep in mind that they have already lost contact with hope by the time counselees make it to counseling. Therefore, they must be quickly connected [or reconnected] to kingdom hope.¹²⁷

Hope theory provides some insight into the value of helping people move toward change, acknowledging that suffering people likely lack enough hope to begin any movement toward adjustment relative to their area of affliction. According to theorists, hope is domain-specific, meaning one can be a generally hopeful person, but have diminished hope in a particular aspect

¹²⁵ Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Hope: A Theological Exploration," *Studia Theologica* 73, no. 2 (2019): 123, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2019.1663366>.

¹²⁶ Catherine M. Byrne, and Deidre D. Morgan, "Patterns of Religiosity, Death Anxiety, and Hope in a Population of Community-Dwelling Palliative Care Patients in New Zealand—What Gives Hope If Religion Can't?," *American journal of hospice & palliative medicine* 37, no. 5 (2020): 381, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049909119891148>.

¹²⁷ Denise J. Larsen et al., "Multidimensional Hope in Counseling and Psychotherapy Scale," *Journal of psychotherapy integration* 30, no. 3 (2020): 409, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/int0000198>.

of life.¹²⁸ It is important to understand that although their condition may be isolated to a single element of their life, the trauma and associated distress are likely severe enough to find the counselee stuck and hopeless. The more time that passes with the counselee stuck in a hopeless state, the deeper the hopelessness will be felt by the individual. The longer one struggles to throw off the wretchedness and spiritual depletion created by the bonds of the world, the more difficult it will be to return to freedom.¹²⁹ Therefore, the recommendation is that a source of hope is introduced immediately to stabilize the condition of the counselee.

Hope is an influential force, having a negative effect when lacking, but it has a reparative effect when present¹³⁰. Therefore, the counseling process can be conducted with the discovery of an original hope, serving as a light at the end of the tunnel, with others being added as they are revealed.¹³¹ The initial hope offering is one rooted in the concept that God has the answers for the future, which inspires faith.¹³² When the hope in Hope-focused counseling is rooted in the revelation of “God in it,” counselors can capitalize on each revelation of God’s word played out in any circumstance, past or present, inspiring the counselee toward continued cooperation with God’s word. Hope theorists identify that counseling and psychotherapy outcomes are enhanced

¹²⁸ Bartholomew, Joy, and Gundel 2.

¹²⁹ David Seal, "Emotions, Empathy, and Engagement with God in Revelation 6:9–11," *Expository times* 129, no. 3 (2017): 117, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0014524617733927>.

¹³⁰ Mingqi Li, Edward C. Chang, and Olivia D. Chang, "Beyond the Role of Interpersonal Violence in Predicting Negative Affective Conditions in Adults: An Examination of Hope Components in Chinese College Students," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, no. 5-6 (2022): 2158-59, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886260520938515>.

¹³¹ Such as the hope recollections identified by Byrne and Morgan.

¹³² Marius Timmann Mjaaland, "Why Hope?," *Critical Research on Religion* 9, no. 3 (2021): 344, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/20503032211044428>.

when hope is integrated into the counseling process.¹³³ No one can survive without hope, but when one acknowledges the love of God and knows Him as the source and future of hope in their lives, the counselee has a powerful tool for restoration to freedom.¹³⁴

Likewise, Living Prayer, incorporated into the counseling process, provides a high percentage of opportunity for the counselee to experience God's response to their petitions for help, provided the counselee has enough residual faith to engage the process earnestly. Where there is a complete lack of confidence in the relative area of experience, cross-situational God response experiences can be recalled, jumpstarting the relative counseling process, similar to Hope-focused counseling. Any associated positive hope response has a high potential to stimulate a desire to continue the communication process. Counselees will quickly acknowledge or be reminded that God wants the best for them and has a plan for their recovery. As they learn to engage with His feedback, they will be able to experience God capitalizing on His initial provision of hope and see their way to spiritual and emotional healing in the kingdom.

¹³³ Bartholomew, Joy, and Gundel 18.

¹³⁴ Werner G. Jeanrond, "Human Hope and the Reign of God," *Dialog: a journal of theology* 61, no. 1 (2022), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/dial.12711>.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this action research project and its subsequent intervention was to prepare and strengthen a team of seasoned church members to affect the well-being of the members of Lake Church. Creating such a team of Lake Church servants might also positively influence the well-being of those in the surrounding community, as well as the extended social groups of the members. The focus was on an aspect of spiritual absence recognized in the presentations of counselees entering formal counseling or who consulted with members of existing helping resources in a non-formal context.

The counseling office identified that, as it relates to their presenting problems, nearly one hundred percent of counselees presenting with emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles lacked any close connection to spiritual influence. There seemed to be no connection with relative biblical principles, and it was apparent that they had not sought or were not capable of receiving any influence from God relating to their perceived problems. Most presenting with such struggles had deeply established conflicts with kingdom thinking because of the apparent influence of worldly thinking. The associated corrupt thoughts cause the individual to live a lifestyle driven by emotional confusion, interpersonal conflict, or a loss of self-efficacy. When left to flourish, worldly thinking causes a person to become stuck in a never-ending state of confusion, conflict, or hopelessness. Being stuck is related to one's inability to

draw on strategies, skills, and methods to consciously overcome the negative effects of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development stressors.¹³⁵

Many of those who initially opted for informal counseling with lay helpers eventually seek formal counseling. The transition from informal types of lay help to formal counseling is often necessary because informal types of help have not provided the necessary positive influence on thinking that is necessary to effect correction of thought and bring about behavioral adjustment. Consequently, the counseling program at Lake Church has found no real difference in thinking between those who take their problem directly to formal counseling and those who start with lay helpers and then transition to formal counseling.

To affect the stated problem, the researcher initiated a search for a group of lay leaders who had access to Lake Church members and others in the local community. The selected group would have to be one in which its members were already involved as lay ministry leaders, if not already lay helpers. The individuals would need to have access to the church membership in a way that was natural for them to interact with those experiencing life's struggles. They would also need to be teachable and able to learn to identify basic emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development conditions. Finally, they would need to understand the value of prayer as a way of communicating with God and learn how to use prayer to move one from their current place to the place God has prepared for them.

¹³⁵ Steve le Roux, and George Lotter, "Fight, Flight or Faith: A Pastoral Model for Spiritual Coping," *In die skriflig : tydskrif van die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 55, no. 2 (2021), <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i2.2700>.

Participant Selection

Through his effort to identify the church's most viable first-line source of lay helpers for those seeking informal support with their emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles, the researcher evaluated the practices of the Lake Church prayer team known as the Prayer Partners. Subsequently, the determination was that the Lake Church prayer team was the internal body with the most members who could be identified as leaders and lay helpers. Since the effort was to train the church's front-line lay helpers to utilize the concept of Living Prayer in their existing helping practices, it stood to reason that a group of members already involved in engaging the Lord on behalf of those struggling was right for the effort.

Since the selected group was to be trained as LPCs, it was necessary to disclose to each potential participant that there was to be more than just a presentation on the value of prayer. Participants needed to understand that they would be trained as Living Prayer Coaches. To be sure this was abundantly clear, the training seminar and the training manual it would use were titled "Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness," and the appropriate language was used on the required IRB "Consent" form. It is not just coincidental that the prayer team was the most desirable team from which to choose project participants; team members already understood the significant value of prayer. Functionally, it was not a stretch to identify prayer team members as lay helpers.

Most Lake Church members are well acquainted with each prayer team member; team members were often approached by individuals experiencing emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles with prayer requests. In some cases, they were simply handed a prayer request form and, in other cases, were asked to pray with them on the spot or include them in their regular daily prayers. Because this activity directly affects the well-being of the

requesting individuals, prayer team members were legitimately identified as lay helpers.

Although a few prayer team members were intimidated by being identified as lay helpers or understood that the impending training intended to establish them as such, most people invited agreed that they were already lay helpers.

This was an easy acknowledgment since it was also the case that nearly every prayer team member was additionally involved with other Lake Church ministries. Most prayer team members served in a leadership, director, or leader/teacher capacity, in ministries such as the worship team, children's ministry, youth ministry, adult men, women, couples, and senior ladies ministries, missionary care team, the deacon board, or outreach ministries such as the homeless feeding ministry and evangelism team. Additionally, several were Certified Mental Health Coach - First Responders (C-MHC) trained by the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) and served as support agents of the counseling ministry. Consequently, all prayer team members met the qualifications of a lay leader and were viable candidates for receiving the LPC training. As such, the pastor of Lake Church was presented with the benefits of using the Lake Church prayer team as the recipient of the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness training, which were:

- The prayer team was a unified body of believers.
- It had a passion for service.
- It possessed a strong understanding of the value of prayer.
- It was a group that included members serving in many areas of ministry.
- It provided good cross-ministry coverage with the church.
- It had in its member base a strong contingency of identifiable lay helpers.
- Its members were respected members of the church.

- The membership of the church was aware of its purpose and function.
- Its members were already privy to the struggles of the church members.

After being presented with the basic concept of Living Prayer coaching and acknowledging the pastor's approval, the prayer team leaders agreed to endorse the initiative and participate in the associated training. The prayer team leaders identified the prayer team as having been made up of current, extended, and identified eligible future members. Finally, the prayer team's leadership identified all of its current, extended, and future members to the researcher, and endorsed the action research project at its next weekly meeting.

Intervention Design

The researcher's first responsibility was to acquire Internal Review Board (IRB) approval for the project. Very soon after submission, the researcher received permission to begin from the IRB: See Appendix H for IRB approval. The intervention began with a plan to recruit twelve participants from the rolls of the Lake Church prayer team to create a representative group of approximately ten percent of the active members of the church. Participants were required to be at least eighteen years of age and be current, extended, or eligible future Lake Church prayer team members. During the project's planning stage, it was decided that two additional members would be recruited to ensure a twelve-person minimum sample size, in case one or two participants were to drop out of the project. It was also decided that more members than the required fourteen would need to be invited to be sure enough people would agree to participate. Therefore, thirty (30) prayer team members were approached and provided a packet that included

the Invitation Letter, the standard Internal Review Board (IRB) consent form, and a seminar schedule.

The IRB consent form disclosed to invitees the purpose of the project and the scope of participant involvement. Participants were asked to read and indicate an understanding of their rights and responsibilities and convey their agreement to participate by signing the consent form. Participant responsibilities included attending a three-hour Living Prayer seminar, participating in a four-week trial period, and completing two surveys. Of the thirty prayer team members invited, a total of fourteen members agreed to participate.

Participant Training

Two three-hour seminars-style training sessions were conducted with live presentations by the researcher on a Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm (30-minutes for lunch, plus breaks) and Sunday from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm (no lunch or breaks). Eight participants attended the Saturday session, with the remaining six participants attending the Sunday session. Live training was conducted at both seminars to keep the participants' attention and allow the trainer to control the environment and minimize distractions. The researcher chose live presentations because they were preferable to recorded sessions used in a group setting or internet-accessible sessions viewable from home or other locations where distractions were possible. In a recent study, 43% of participants reported mind wandering while watching video presentations after only fourteen minutes.¹³⁶

The LPC training was conducted seminar-style with three hours of live training. The subjects of Basic Theoretical Perspectives, Theological Perspectives, Practical Living Prayer

¹³⁶ R. Benjamin Hollis, and Christopher A. Was, "Mind Wandering, Control Failures, and Social Media Distractions in Online Learning," *Learning and Instruction* 42 (2016): 110, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.01.007>.

Coaching, and Application of Living Prayer Coaching were taught in 45-minute subject-focused segments. The training design focused specifically on introducing the concept of Living Prayer as a bridge to hope, with the destination being the kingdom of God, where the thinking of the world is overcome.

Instruction & Training Methods

The researcher used an expository instructional method to move participants through the basics of the theoretical concept of hope in counseling and the hope-focused counseling approach, and the identifiable theological truth of hope and prayer to set the stage for the primary subject of Living Prayer Coaching. Living Prayer was taught as a tool for overcoming the flawed thinking of worldly concepts, with full engagement in the Bible. Finally, the participants were moved to a place of application where all the material learned could be developed into a single lay counseling concept. The theoretical and theological sections were based on the research conducted for this action research project to ensure continuity in design and reporting. Through the entire process, the underlying objective of developing lay helpers or helping existing lay helpers improve their helping practices using Living Prayer was frequently integrated into the training to keep the intended objective resident in the participants' minds.

The researcher presented the core of the Living Prayer training using the Practical Living Prayer Coaching section of the *Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide* found in Appendix E. The Practical Living Prayer Coaching section was designed and presented using an integrated method of teaching, bringing together the theoretical, theological, and practical components of the project. The Integrated Method helps students draw on existing knowledge as they add new concepts to it and helps them understand the relevancy of the learning material

against the backdrop of the subject matter.¹³⁷ The method was selected to improve the possibility that participants would maintain a well-rounded understanding of the Living Prayer concept, as well as understand the value of the concept from all relevant perspectives.

The logic behind the integrated approach of the Living Prayer Coach training is that it included subjects from four distinct disciplines, typically taught in a more general sense at a college level. A segmented training approach would require some prerequisite type of training in theology, psychology, sociology, counseling, and ethics and practices, which would leave participants feeling overwhelmed, undereducated, or otherwise incapable of serving as a lay helper or LPC. An integrated approach provided the participant with only the necessary components of each discipline, allowing the participant to make a focused connection to only those concepts that are necessary for Living Prayer coaching. It is believed that the participant would have a higher level of relative self-efficacy at the end of the training using an integrated teaching approach. With lay helper effectiveness being the priority of the training, confidence in Living Prayer as an approach to helping was imperative.

Training Objectives

Theoretical Component

The training included an integrated theoretical component that provided the participants with relevant information based on literature and research from the sciences and Christian counseling realms over the last ten years. Throughout the training section titled Basic Theoretical Perspectives, biblical viewpoints aimed at validating each theoretical assertion were present. The purpose was to integrate an understandable foundation that expressed to the Christian helper the

¹³⁷ Scott A. Civjan, "An Integrated Teaching Method for Design Courses," *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 20, no. 11 (2020): 172-73, <https://dx.doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v20i11.3773>.

value of frontline responders for those experiencing emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development problems. By understanding, from a biblical perspective, the basics of the several relevant theories and approaches, participants had an opportunity to understand the value of counseling and therapy and how a counselee who may eventually seek counseling might experience adjustment.

The theoretical teaching began with a discussion on the importance and value of people helping people, which informs men and women to serve each other. Since the audience was one of existing church leaders, the helping concept was built from the standpoint of biblical teachings. Participants learned that, by the implication of 1 Peter 4:10, they, the Lake Church leaders, are to share the gifts of God which they have received with others. Once provided with a tool one can use to grow closer to God, the participant would need to be prepared to share that tool with others. They learned that the gift is prayer, and the objective is knowing God and making a commitment to the thinking found only in the kingdom of God.

Participants learned what science and the Christian/pastoral counseling disciplines infer about spiritual formation, correction, prayer, kingdom lifestyle, and hope. They learned that helping Christians with spiritual formation is not only the responsibility of the church's pastor, but also the church's lay leadership. Teachers, mentors, counselors, and lay helpers have a vital role in helping those who need growth or realignment with the Lord and kingdom thinking. A strong relationship between correction and prayer was presented as the foundation of Living Prayer. It was identified that people cannot make changes to their way of thinking on their own.

Participants were shown that correction, according to Hebrews 13:3-14, is a product of one allowing God to change their thinking through a continuous process of transformation. They learned that the transformation process is only possible when one agrees that God is King and

His graceful ways, which are found in the kingdom, lead to growth and peace. Choice Theory/Reality Therapy (CT/RT) was presented as a key theoretical perspective placing emphasis on one's responsibility to choose their direction, motivations, attitudes, and method of becoming the person that they believe they are to become.¹³⁸ It was shown that each person is responsible for their behavior and that they choose the influences that guide their thinking. Psalms 37:4 identifies that when one gives in to the Lord, He provides for their motivations and becomes the most positive influence on how they set goals.

Hope was identified as an essential component of any goal focused on change. It was revealed that hope is domain-specific, meaning that counselors and lay helpers must help people suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles find hope in the specific area of dysfunction. Hope-Focused Counseling was presented as an example of an approach to change that is centered around hope. It was explained that Hope theorists identify that counseling and psychotherapy outcomes are enhanced when hope is integrated into the counseling process.¹³⁹ Finally, participants were taught that hope leads to faith, and that identifying a source of hope increases faith, supports a sense of agency, and leads to goal attainment. Participants learned that when Living Prayer is integrated into the counseling process, counselees will have increased opportunities to experience God's reactions to their prayer process, strengthening faith, and moving them toward correction more rapidly.

¹³⁸ Joycelyn G. Parish, and Thomas S. Parish, "Religious Concepts and William Glasser's Choice Theory- the Role of Choice, Viewed Anciently and Today," *International Journal of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy* 38, no. 2 (2019), <http://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/>.

¹³⁹ Bartholomew, Joy, and Gundel.; Theodore T. Bartholomew, Michael J. Scheel, and Brian P. Cole, "Development and Validation of the Hope for Change through Counseling Scale," *The Counseling psychologist* 43, no. 5 (2015), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0011000015589190>.

By the time participants completed the training, they had the opportunity to discover the practicality of Living Prayer against the backdrop of counseling. Participants also had an opportunity to see how the work done at the onset of the presentation of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development problems aids in the overall positive adjustment of counselees. This allowed the participant to see how their early involvement with individuals suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles to set the stage for future next-level counseling support.

Theological Component

The theological component prepared the participants to apply Living Prayer based on a biblical perspective. Participants had an opportunity to connect with specific theological truths that establish the necessity and practicality of Living Prayer as a gateway to a focused kingdom lifestyle. They experienced biblical perspectives as they contemplated a Living Prayer approach to the emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development needs of those they serve.

Participants made a connection to the kingdom of God and learned that, in it, the thinking of the world is overcome, but that without the insulation of the kingdom, man faces frustration and torment from the world. Participants were asked to acknowledge that, according to most Christian worldviews, the world is a place that guarantees some suffering.¹⁴⁰ Christians do necessarily go through struggles, but according to 1 Peter 5:7, God has a high level of empathy for every struggle His children bear. At this point, the concept of casting one's burdens on the Lord was introduced to the class as a process that requires significant effort on the part of the

¹⁴⁰ M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, and Peter Hill, "Meaning-Making, Suffering, and Religion: A Worldview Conception," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 22, no. 5 (2019): 168, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2019.1625037>.

caster, but that if one does so, God will bear them and their burden. The Apostle Paul was offered up as an example of one suffering from a great burden.

Participants learned that Paul did not initially realize that his strength was insufficient to take him through his suffering, but that once he understood his insufficiency and turned to God, Paul would begin to learn how God wanted him to experience his burden.¹⁴¹ Paul learned that God's grace, not Paul's own vitality, would be the strength that allowed him to continue on his mission. Paul's initial confusion regarding his ability to tell God what needed to be done to correct his problem was presented as an example of how prayer is misused. Paul, in 2 Corinthians, told the Lord that the best way God could help him was to remove his burden. The Lord used that opportunity to tell Paul that he only needed to rely on Him. Participants learned that Paul did not initially consider the will of God, but that because Paul did communicate with God, the Lord revealed His will to the burdened Apostle.

Discussed with participants was the likelihood that people having any number of life-related problems would seek the influence and support of the world to resolve their burdens. It was also shown biblically that the Lord requires man to submit to His will. Romans 12:1-2 identifies that even though Christians must reside in the world, they are not to allow the world to control them. The term kingdom dweller was introduced to indicate one who lives according to the influence of God and His ways. Kingdom dwellers were defined according to the Ephesians 5:1-5 standard, which identifies that they are to walk in love as they seek to imitate Christ, who gave Himself as a sacrifice for their sin. Kingdom dwellers were represented as individuals who know themselves to be ever-developing saints and strive only to be seen by people according to that standard.

¹⁴¹ Biblical reference: 2 Cor. 12:7-10

Participants, being made up of a group of existing leaders and lay helpers, were reminded of the Bible's call on Christian leaders to be a support to those to whom they minister, teach, lead, mentor, and as put by Dianne J. Chandler, care for each other as did Jesus.¹⁴² The training included an acknowledgment of John 15:4-8 in which leaders are reminded that without a solid irreversible connection to the Lord, they cannot produce fruit. The connection the leader has with the Lord is imperative since the leader, who is to guide others, must receive the Lord's guidance and leadership to be an effective helper to others. Participants were familiarized with the concept of Living Prayer as a tool for moving others from the thinking and influence of the world to a place of safety in the kingdom. They were also shown that the lay helper must actively engage God as they help those suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles to be effective helpers.

Participants learned to connect with Jesus's explanation that all change is possible through faith in Him. Mark 11:23-24 tells of the Lord's assertion that every obstacle, including mountains, no matter its size, can be moved through faith in Him. Participants were instructed that leaders serving as lay helpers must resource the Lord's ability to help move those mountains and must be equipped and prepared to share God's mountain-moving authority with those they serve. Finally, participants were called to service with a reading of Matthew 28:19-20, to be sure they understood that the Lord calls them to tell others all things that the Lord has told them.

Living Prayer Coaching Component

The Living Prayer component is the core of the training which focuses on the actual intervention of Living Prayer and is the portion of the training with which the theoretical and

¹⁴² Diane J. Chandler, "Creation Care: A Call to Christian Educators and Church Leaders," *Christian education journal* 18, no. 1 (2021): 115-16, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739891320947103>.

theological components were integrated. The theoretical and theological information included was pulled into the overall concept of Living Prayer to build an organized and informed plan of use. Participants learned the concept of how to use Living Prayer in their own lives by connecting directly with well-known biblical references and had opportunities to make better connections to passages they may not have given any intentional consideration in past studies. They also learned how to deploy Living Prayer coaching into the lives of individuals experiencing emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles through biblical examples.

Coaching Ethics & Practices Integrated

Ethics and practices were integrated throughout the training program, primarily by identifying that LPCs are not counselors and identifying that the goal of an LPC is to help prepare people for the eventuality of counseling. Since they are not counselors, participants were not introduced to any particular codes of ethics. However, they were reminded that upon joining the Lake Church prayer team, they signed a contract prohibiting them from disclosing any information gained through any function of the prayer team. Participants were informed that their involvement with persons experiencing emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles carries with it great responsibility.

Application of the Living Prayer Coaching Component

The final section of the training began with a reminder that becoming a LPC does not constitute becoming a counselor. To remove any confusion for anyone who may have felt overwhelmed by the amount of information provided, the instructor provided, via the training guide, two statements that summarized both the concept of Living Prayer and the objective of the training.

1. Consider Living Prayer as a naturally occurring progressive process of moving through the adjustment process from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles by continuously engaging God, who desires to move one to a place of rejoicing.
2. Our effort as helpers in the church must be to point lost people to the cross, and all people to God, who has established a place of safety, adjustment, and correction of thought – His kingdom.”

Participants then learned how to identify the four conditions of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles in the church context. The definitions were also provided to help the participants focus on a narrower set of presenting conditions and reduce the potential for information overload to affect their confidence. Furthermore, it is essential for lay helpers, who may not have formal training in counseling, to be able to identify in a person’s behavior or through the words they speak, that they are suffering somehow. Participants received a simplified definition of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.

Conditions of Struggle Identified

For lay helpers, the concepts of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development conditions causing struggles in members can be intimidating. Since it is possible for some participants to become intimidated by terms that are often used in a clinical sense, the conditions identified were reduced to their simplest state, and basic language was used in their definitions. Participants were taught that each condition that may eventually require formal counseling often begins as a less intense struggle. Participants were also taught that suffering individuals might not initially recognize the associated effects of their condition, but a caring observer may be able to help them identify a need for preventative attention from a counselor. From a church lay helper’s perspective, participants were trained to notice or identify the following conditions:

Emotional

Emotional considerations are rooted in fear and the loss of hope and faith. Emotion is related to how we feel inside about ourselves *in* our circumstances. This is where anxiety and depression live. Causes are related to things that have happened in the past, are happening now, or are expected to happen in the future.

Spiritual

Feelings of separation from God. One does not feel worthy of God or His attention on their life, believes God is intentionally absent from their life, or they are finding it difficult to live as God desires them to.

Relational

An individual's experiences, in some or all of their relationships, are not fulfilling and do not meet expectations. They constantly struggle to get along with their counterparts and find no satisfaction or appreciation in the feedback they receive from others.

Personal development

Those suffering from personal development issues are often experiencing low self-esteem, have self-efficacy fears (self-doubt), desire, but fear change, have little faith that God will walk with them, or lack enough awareness of God to understand that He desires to use them.

Examples of Using Living Prayer Provided

Finally, it was necessary to allow the participants to connect with the actual use of Living Prayer and learn how they might use it in their lay helper roles. Scenarios related to communication, anxiety, education, interview stress, sleep, frustration, and one advanced scenario related to a marriage struggle were presented and discussed. Each condition was

accompanied by simple step-by-step examples of how one might employ Living Prayer in the situation.

Example 1.

Communication - I am having a hard time watching what or how I say things to my spouse.

- 1) Filter everything through God.
- 2) As you speak, realize that the Lord, a member of your marriage, is listening as a living member of your family. Know that if you say something that is offensive to your spouse, it is also offensive to God.
- 3) Conversely, if it is pleasing to the Lord, it should be pleasing to your spouse – speak those words.

Example 2.

Anxiety - I am afraid when I experience a trigger that kicks off anxiety.

- 1) Know that God is with you at that very moment and wants to move you through your anxiety to a place of safety in Him. A place where peace rules over fear.
- 2) Actually, reach out your hand and take the Lord's hand - He is sitting or standing right next to you now. Tell Him in a whisper what triggered the anxiety and what you are afraid of.
- 3) In faith, ask Him to take your anxiety away.
- 4) Now let go of His hand and thank Him for taking *it* away. You can rejoice and go on *your* way.
- 5) He will remain with you, so ask Him to take your triggers on himself. He can handle them because He is God.

Example 3.

Education - **Sometimes, I have difficulty studying and retaining the material, or I get stuck and cannot develop an idea to write about.**

- 1) You have a study partner right there with you. Read your notes to Him and tell Him what you know about the subject.
- 2) Now, tell Him about your struggles and ask Him to clear your mind of the pressure and give you the peace you need to study.
- 3) Read the writing prompt to Him if you are writing and cannot develop something to write about.

Example 4.

Interview Stress - **I am afraid to go on interviews because I lack confidence.**

- 1) Give the responsibility for the outcome to the Lord. Don't just say the words but give the responsibility to Him.
- 2) You can walk into the interview with Him and know that if He wants you to have the job, He will make it happen – **REJOICE**.
- 3) If He does not want you to have the job, He will take care of that also – **REJOICE**.

Example 5.

Sleep - **I wake up at night and cannot get back to sleep because I am thinking about things.**

- 1) Know that God is even with you at night.
- 2) Take a couple of moments to put together a mental list of the two or three things that are on your mind.

- 3) Start a conversation with the Lord that start out like this: Lord, I have a few things on my mind, I would like to share them with you so you can lift the burden and put me to sleep.
- 4) Now calmly and restfully tell Him about them. It really works!

Example 6.

Frustration – **I do my best to be the one who brings an argument to a conclusion, to keep it from becoming a fight, but I end up with my emotions all bottled up inside.**

- 1) You need an outlet, so you can know you have been heard.
- 2) Go to a private place and whisper your side of the argument to the Lord, who was there during the argument and knows both sides. Don't point fingers – just tell your story.
- 3) Ask Him to hear you out and inspire you through His word to understand where you were wrong and where your position lines up with His will.
- 4) Ask Him to lead your counterpart to His word or a person who can help them get the story you have gotten.
- 5) Remember to include the Word, wise counsel, and the Holy Spirit in your listening process.

Example 7.

ADVANCED CONDITION: I am having a problem loving my spouse the way I know I should, but there is a barrier and I do not know what it is.

- 1) Love is not a thing that we know well. It is a natural aspect of God's nature that we have deep inside of us, since He created us in His image, but our fallen flesh wants to do things our own way, not His.

- 2) This is not a time to be left alone, but to draw near to God, who knows how to help you adjust your thinking from self-thought and worldly thinking to kingdom thinking. He already knows that you are struggling in your relationship and heart, and he knows what is missing. He is just the one to develop a plan for your adjustment back to love.
- 3) Tell God the whole story – he wants to hear you acknowledge your heart and mind on the subject.
- 4) Open the Bible to 1 Corinthians 13 and begin learning about God, love, and who you can be. Listen to God talk to you as you read His words.
- 5) Ask God to reveal to you the resources that are available to you through your church, wise group of friends, family, and Christian counseling ministries.
- 6) As you take each step toward these resources, ask God to be your advisor and help you hear Him in the voice of those He has sent to assist you.
- 7) Don't take a step without God; rely on Him like the Father He is and trust His guidance.
- 8) Your effort is to allow Him, using the resources He chooses, to move you away from the thinking of the world to that place of rejoicing in the kingdom.

The purpose of the personal connection to using Living Prayer was to allow participants to recognize personally applicable scenarios that could help them find value in the concept. This way, their future sharing will be more like a testimony than instruction. The scenarios also demonstrate the versatility of using Living Prayer in all aspects of life. Students were informed that each of the examples provided were actual Living Prayer interventions used in real

counseling contexts, and that the client responses were positive. This section of the training was presented last to prepare participants for the independent study portion of the project, which requires students to consider how to use Living Prayer, first in their personal lives, then in sharing it with those who need their support and the guidance of the Lord.

Independent Study Assignment

The final training process allowed participants to consume what they learned from the training, reconnect with the training guide to fill in learning gaps, and apply their unique creativity to the concept as they intentionally integrated Living Prayer into their helping styles. Participants received final instructions: “Over the next four weeks, you are asked to review the training guide, complete the Struggles Identification Worksheet at the end of this training guide, and employ what you learned as you see fit.” The referenced worksheet’s purpose was to motivate participants to reengage with the training guide and help them identify the need for Living Prayer in their ministry context.

The Struggles Identification Worksheet provided three questions related to each of the Conditions of Struggle identified as emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development identified in the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness training manual. The heading of each section provided the basic definition of each conditional struggle. The questions were:

1. What circumstances or experiences can lead to _____ crisis or struggle?¹⁴³
2. What kind of needs might we anticipate for a person experiencing _____ struggles?
3. What is missing that God can provide if asked?

¹⁴³ In the training guide, one of the struggles found in the Struggles Identification Worksheet are in place of the blank line.

Space was provided under each question so that participants would feel compelled to consider the question and give an answer.

A Blessing Given to the Participants

In concluding the training seminar, the instructor provided a blessing to the participants, worded in such a way as to inspire participants to employ Living Prayer in their own lives. Relative keywords, reflective of the training, were used to inspire remembrance of the core principles of Living Prayer: “Be intentional and seek a full-time, full-on, and fully focused relationship with God, who truly desires to move you from the world to a place of rejoicing.” The Post Training Survey was handed out to the participants after a concluding prayer.

Quantitative Data Collection

Value Analysis Survey

The LPC training session concluded with the Post-Training Survey to evaluate the participant's probability of using the Living Prayer concept in their own lives and their confidence in using Living Prayer Coaching to help struggling members. Four weeks after the training, participants completed the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire to evaluate their personal use of Living Prayer and their actual use of Living Prayer Coaching to help those with emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Preparation

At the beginning of the researcher's registration in the Liberty University Doctor of Ministry program, he met with the pastor of Lake Church to review the program's expectations.

At that time, the pastor agreed to allow the researcher to conduct an action research project using the facilities and membership to complete the associated tasks. At the beginning of the researcher's candidacy, an initial planning meeting with the Lake Church pastor was held to discuss the upcoming project's basic concept, including the proposed group from which participants were to be selected. The pastor agreed to allow the researcher to use the prayer team as the research subjects during the meeting.

After submission, the Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the project, and the researcher's faculty mentor gave his official permission to begin the project. During a final planning meeting with the Lake Church pastor, the pastor approved the location and dates for the training seminars, and he gave his blessing and prayed over the project. With the pastor's approval secured, the researcher asked the administrative assistant to place the room reservations on the church's schedule, and the recruiting process began.

Recruiting Process

The recruiting process began with the prayer team leaders announcing that the project was approved. The leaders were informed of the locations and dates of the training, agreed to participate, and signed the approved consent form. Over the next two weeks, the rest of the past, current, extended, and eligible prayer team members were approached by the researcher and asked to participate in the project.

Training Seminars

Initially, the training schedule included only one seminar-style program to be held on a Saturday. The researcher added one additional seminar scheduled for the next day (Sunday) to accommodate those participants already committed to other ministry and personal activities. The

researcher conducted the instruction using a lecture-style format, with learning aids, including a PowerPoint presentation and a bound training guide.

The Saturday event was held in the church office conference area from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm, with lunch provided. The schedule was designed to allow for four 45-minute training sessions, with the last 15 minutes of each session presented as discussion periods and an opportunity for a restroom break. These 15-minute buffers allowed the instructor some flexibility to continue teaching but permitted the participants to exit the session as needed to attend to personal needs. Lunch was provided in the church's cafeteria during a planned 30-minute break.

The Sunday seminar was conducted in the prayer team/counseling department's conference room. The Sunday session strictly adhered to the same instructional style and timing as the previous seminar to be sure participants from both sessions were similarly trained. One key difference between the two sessions was that there was no meal or planned mid-seminar break. The session began at 2:00 pm and ended at 5:00 pm. Breaks were given at the end of each section as needed, which simulated the non-instruction time from the Saturday session. Parallel to the Saturday session, the researcher conducted the instruction using a lecture-style format, with learning aids, including a PowerPoint presentation and a bound training guide.

Post Training Survey

The final section of the training went approximately ten minutes long on both days of the Living Prayer seminar. Although 15-minutes were allocated to complete the Post-Training survey, only five minutes were available at the end of the Saturday and Sunday Sessions. Participants were given the questionnaire and directed to enter their four-digit PIN in the space provided at the top of the form, complete the questionnaire, place their completed forms in the

box labeled “surveys,” and be dismissed. Most participants finished the questionnaire by the scheduled end of the session.

Trial Period

The trial period was a four-week opportunity for trained participants to continue to study the training guide, personally utilize the Living Prayer concept in actual circumstances, and, if possible, help those experiencing struggles. The training sessions did not include instructions on how the participants would use Living Prayer in their ministries. However, the researcher directed participants to Matthew 28:19-20, which commands Christians to teach others what they know about God. At the end of their training session, participants were instructed as follows: “Over the next four weeks, you are asked to review the training guide, complete the Struggles Identification Worksheet located at the end of this training guide, and employ what you have learned as you see fit.”

Post-Trial Period Survey

At the end of the training seminar, participants were told that they would need to complete a final survey at the end of the 4-week trial period titled Post-Trial Period Questionnaire. On the Sunday before the last day of the four-week trial-period, participants were verbally informed that they would receive an email with instructions on completing the final questionnaire. On the following Tuesday, an email to each member explaining the final process of their part of the project provided all necessary instructions. It read:

On Saturday of this week, you will receive, via email, a copy of the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire which you are asked to print, complete, and bring with you to church service on the following day (Sunday). There will be a box on the stage labeled “SURVEYS.” Please deposit your completed questionnaire in that box. Please also let me (Mark) know that you have

completed this task so you can be marked as having completed your obligation to the project. If you are not able to follow this process, please call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx, so we can make arrangements to retrieve your completed questionnaire.

On Saturday of that same week, participants received an email with a pdf version of the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire attached, that read:

Dear participant,

Please allow me to thank you again for your participation in the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness training program. We have reached the end of the four-week trial period, which means it is time for you to respond to the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire, which is attached to this email message. Please follow the instructions below:

1. Print the attached file, which consists of four pages.
2. Write your original four-digit PIN in the space provided at the top of the first page.
3. Follow the instructions at the top of the first page.
4. Please answer all of the questions.
5. Bring your completed survey to church with you on Sunday (tomorrow).
6. Place your completed survey in the box marked (SURVEYS) located on the right side of the stage.
7. Let me (Mark) know that you have completed this process so that you can be marked as finished.

Please let me know if I need to make any special accommodations for you to be able to complete this task by calling me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Thanks again for your participation in this project.

Rejoice Always!

Mark Painter

Several copies of the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire were printed and kept on hand for those who did not bring their completed survey to the church on the designated day. The researcher provided only one printed survey for completion on submission day.

Data Collection Design

Quantitative data was collected from fourteen participants to evaluate the perceived value of LPC training for improving the effectiveness of lay helpers at Lake Church. The initial survey was strictly formatted as a Likert scale questionnaire containing eleven questions, requiring respondents to select from an interval scale set of answers. The final questionnaire followed a more eclectic approach to quantitative data collection, with seven questions offering interval scale answer sets, four with dichotomous answer sets, four with ratio scale answer sets, and one with a categorical answer set.

The researcher was not only interested in the LPC training's effect on the whole group, but also in how the training affected each participant individually. The initial survey, titled: Post-Training Questionnaire, evaluated whether each individual learned the value of Living Prayer in promoting increased communication with God and its ability to inspire hope, adjustment, correction of thought, and preparation for future counseling. The initial questionnaire also

evaluated whether participants believed their training helped prepare them to use, teach, and minister using the principles of Living Prayer.

The final survey, titled: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire, also a quantitative data collection device, was used to evaluate whether participant confidence regarding perceived effectiveness was increased by the extended self-training conducted during the four-week trial period. The initial task was to determine if the participants completed the assigned tasks associated with the trial period and if doing so increased their personal use of the Living Prayer concept. The questionnaire also provided data related to participants' perceived confidence in the Living Prayer concept, and asked questions related to how they used their training in their personal lives and ministry activities. Finally, the questionnaire asked participants to identify whether they believe they received enough training to make them comfortable incorporating the Living Prayer concept in their current helping ministries.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The executed data collection plan associated with this Doctor of Ministry action research project focused on participants' perceived effectiveness of Living Prayer coaching. The project intended to help Lake Church members learn to use Living Prayer as a gateway to a focused kingdom lifestyle. The researcher selected, trained, and surveyed a group of Lake Church leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program designed to teach a specific method of helping members make a connection to God before needing and entering formal counseling. Although the training associated with this quality improvement project intended to see the Living Prayer concept become an adopted method of connection and communication with God by the whole church, a starting point had to be established. To that end, a team of already established lay leaders were trained to take the Living Prayer concept to the members of Lake Church.

Purpose of Data Collection and Analysis

From the conception of this action research project, it was understood that since a preexisting group of already leading members was selected without any prequalification, there would be varying degrees of maturity, ministry styles, and positional authority. Therefore, it was anticipated that there would be great diversity in how Living Prayer would be received and interacted with by participants. Furthermore, there was an even higher expected diversity in how each participant would contemplate its deployment to the rest of the church and community. For the church to expect full membership coverage over time, it would need to identify the particular deployment channels to recognize potential gaps in coverage.

The channels to be identified were not relative to the particular groups that would be affected, such as the youth group, couples' program, or the seniors' ministry. The objective was to identify the methods of expected deployment based on several factors, such as personal confidence, confidence in Living Prayer, and the likelihood that the participant would be willing to share, teach, or coach others. These factors will help identify whether a participant will be one who only uses Living Prayer with struggles and can give a testimonial account to others regarding this value or will teach or actively coach others to use the concept. Equipped with such data, the church can determine if the training effectively developed a diverse enough group of lay helpers to help the whole congregation learn to use Living Prayer when faced with life's struggles. If not, the church can hold additional leadership training seminars, or develop other programs to deploy the Living Prayer concept in the church.

Data Collection

Data triangulation was addressed by using a Data-Time-Data approach to data collection, following a specifically designed training program. The process included two quantitative data-collection phases with a four-week separation between the survey activities. The three components of the data triangulation strategy were the Post-Training Questionnaire, the four-week trial period, and the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire. The first data collection activity was conducted after the training seminar to determine if the participant found value in the various aspects of the training, gained new confidence in their ability to serve as a lay helper, increased their confidence, found value in the Living Prayer concept, and felt prepared to share with others. The second data collection activity was conducted after a four-week self-training period, or practicum, which allowed them to continue studying the material and bridge their training to

their personal and ministry activities. Data triangulation was accomplished by evaluating the participant's initial response to the training program, with a second survey conducted after the participant had time to digest the information, thus allowing the researcher the ability to compare the results over time.

Sample Size

The original intervention plan was to have a sample size of approximately ten percent of the active membership of Lake Church. To be sure the final sample size met the standard, the minimum number of participants was set at fourteen to allow for attrition. The total number of participants who attended the seminar and subsequently completed the Post-Training Questionnaire was fourteen. At the end of the four-week practicum, the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire was due, with a one-week automatic extension for those needing more time. It was reported to this researcher that three of the participants were affected by either COVID-19 or bronchitis. One additional survey was received by the survey submission deadline, making twelve the final count of received survey sets. In compliance with the intervention design requirement to only include data from participants who complete all requirements, the researcher dropped the collected questionnaire responses of those who could not complete both surveys from the final data set. The researcher met the minimum representation of 10% of Lake Church's active membership as required.

The reporting hereafter will reflect only the number of participants who completed all program requirements. The participants who could not complete the Post-Training Questionnaire were from the second training seminar, but this fact is not expected to have any bearing on the project or its outcomes. Therefore, the total number of participants reported as having attended the second training was reduced from six to four. Furthermore, the data collected and analyzed

after the Post-Training Questionnaires were collected and recorded was modified to reflect the change and reanalyzed.

Surveys

Phase One Questionnaire Responses

The phase one survey was administered at the end of each of the two three-hour training seminars. The Post-Training Questionnaire (Appendix F) was a paper and pencil survey containing eleven questions. Printed questionnaires were provided directly to the participants by an assistant. There were eight responding participants on the first day, and four responding participants on the second day. Each participant placed their assigned PIN at the top of the survey and turned it in using the receptacle provided to keep their responses anonymous. The response data was transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Question 1

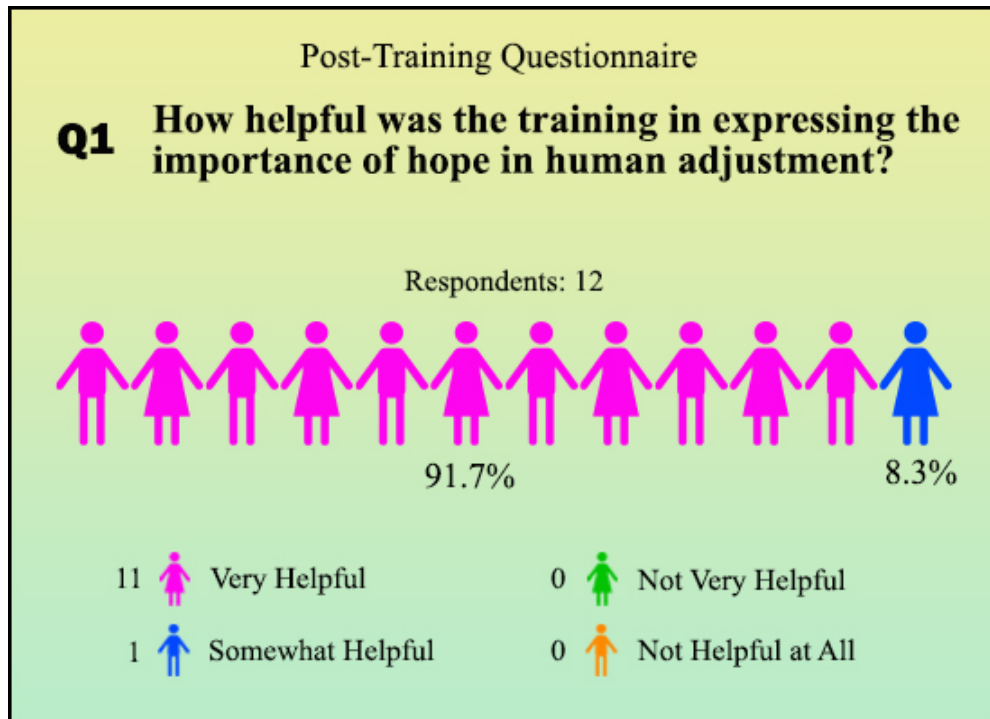


Figure 1: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question One

Question 1 of the Post Training Questionnaire intended to ascertain the lay helper imagined value of the training and remind participants that Living Prayer offers struggling members a method of adjustment from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development conditions. As it relates to adjustment, the concept of hope was a central theme of the associated training, so it was necessary to evaluate the training’s ability to impress on the participants how hope plays into adjustment. To be effective ambassadors of Living Prayer and help prepare struggling members for counseling, lay helpers and Lake Church leaders would need to understand hope’s part in moving people from stuck to free. Overall, participant responses indicate that, as a group, they had a very high belief that the training provided adequate training to express the value of hope in adjustment. Of the twelve respondents, eleven (91.7%) rated the training as very helpful, and one (8.3%) rated the training’s effectiveness in expressing the value of hope in adjustment as somewhat helpful.

Question 2

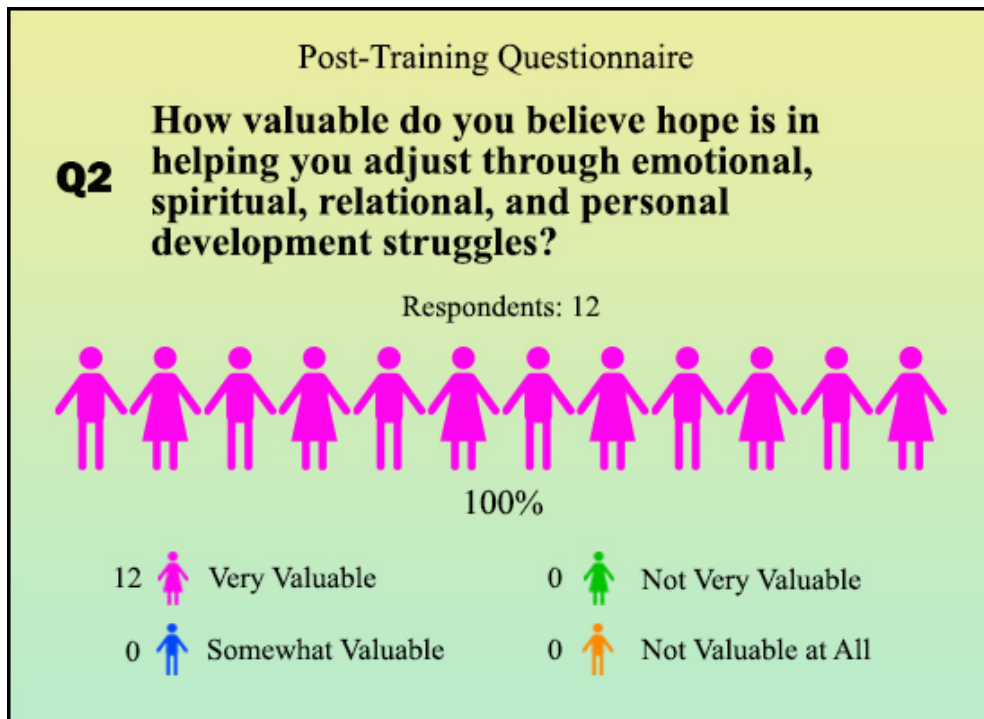


Figure 2: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Two

To evaluate a participant’s ability to understand fully and, therefore, be able to share, teach, and express to others the value of hope in specific areas of struggle, the researcher needed to understand how the participant valued the concept of hope in their personal adjustment. If the participant found hope important and valuable in their own life, they would be more likely to provide testimony about hope’s value to others. All participants responded that hope was “very valuable” for adjusting from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.

Question 3

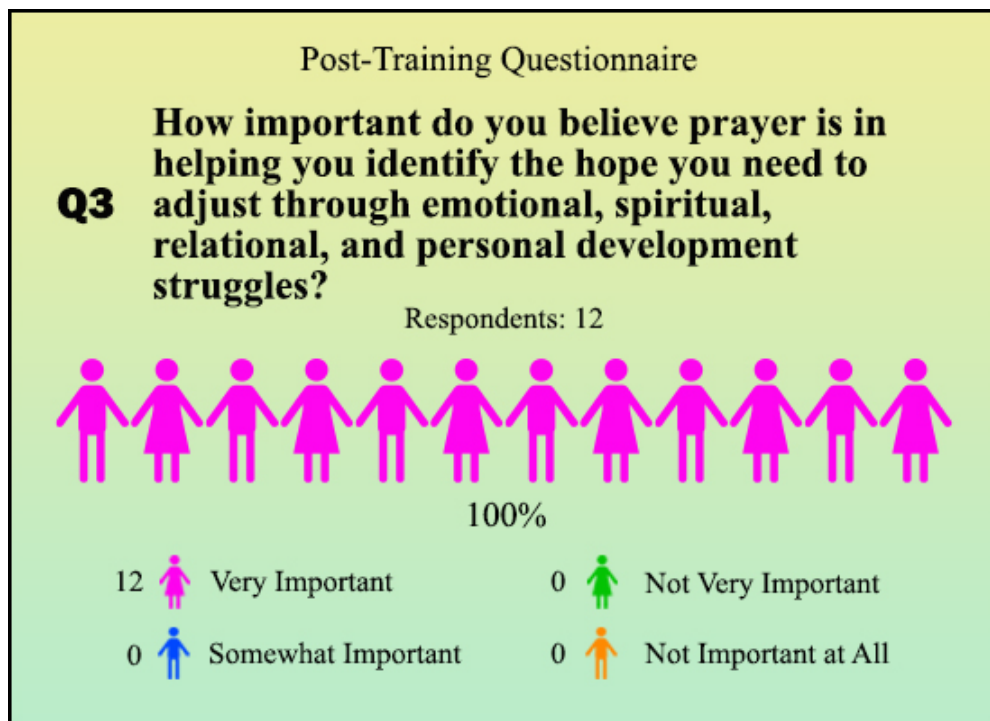


Figure 3: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Three

In the previous question (Question 2), participants identified whether they understood hope as a valuable adjustment tool in their lives. Where Question 2 identified how the participants valued hope, Question 3 sought to identify the level of value participants place on prayer and its function for seeking God for the provision of hope needed to overcome the grip of life’s struggles. Those who responded to Question 1 by accepting hope as valuable in adjustment

also identified prayer as a valuable method for finding hope. In response to Question 2, 100% of respondents indicated that prayer was “Very Important” for identifying the hope one needs for adjustment from struggles.

Question 4

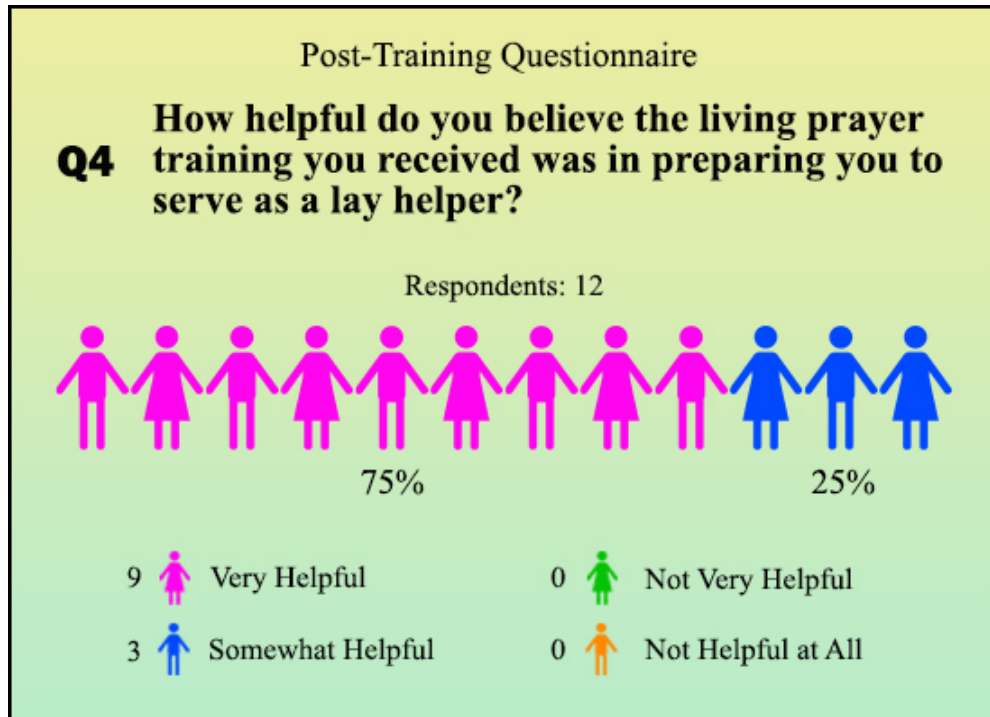


Figure 4: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Four

The overarching purpose of the intervention was to enlist the help of the lay leadership of Lake Church to help members make a stronger connection to the Lord in times of struggle and to help prepare members for the potentiality of counseling. It was only necessary to remind participants that they were already serving as lay helpers in most cases. In other cases, the training goal needed to give participants the little extra knowledge and encouragement they needed to identify as equipped and effective lay helpers.

Responses to Question 4 indicated the training’s effectiveness in inspiring at least some acceptance of the respondents' role as lay helpers and that respondents believed the training

played at least some role in preparing them to serve as lay helpers. Of the respondents, 9 (75%) believed the training helped prepare them as lay helpers, while 3 participants (25%) were only somewhat convinced that the training helped prepare them as lay helpers. The results may indicate a low value of the training’s ability to provide an adequate boost in their helping ability or that the training did not significantly boost confidence for those with preexisting relative self-efficacy.

Question 5

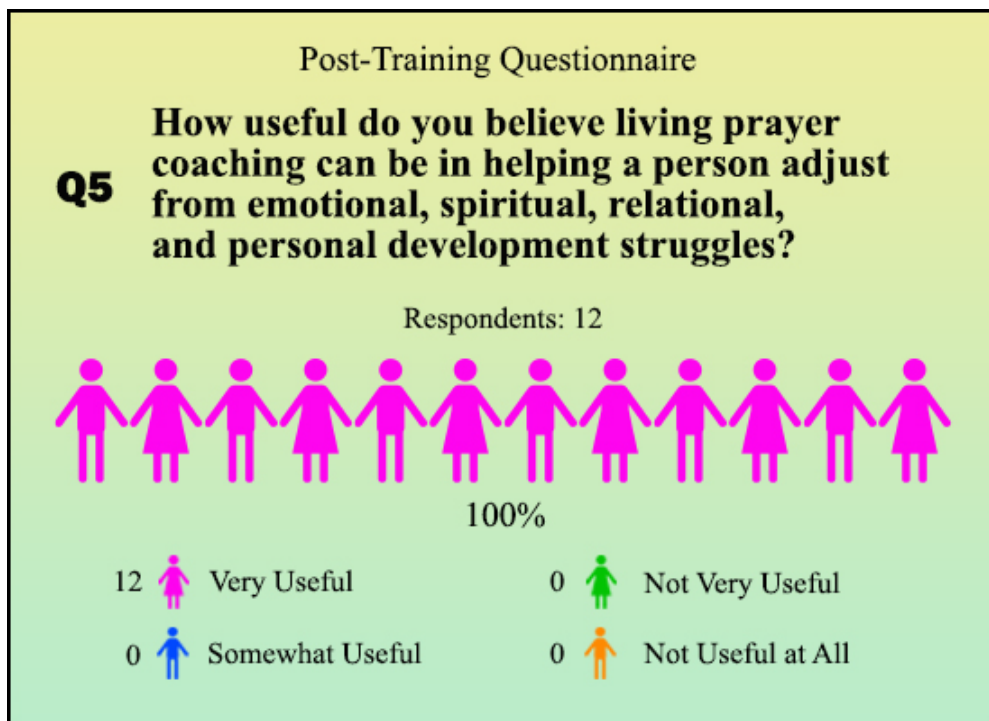


Figure 5: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Five

Question five validated the researcher’s assertion in the explanation of Question 2 that, generally, one who finds personal value in a concept is more likely to understand it as having value for others. Just like 100% of respondents believed Living Prayer was valuable for them, 100% also indicated in their response to Question 5, their belief that others would benefit by having a coach help them use the Living Prayer concept to adjust through their struggles.

Responses did not necessarily indicate that participants were willing to be the acting coach, but that they believed the concept to be valid and that coaching others to use Living Prayer was a viable strategy for recovering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.

Question 6

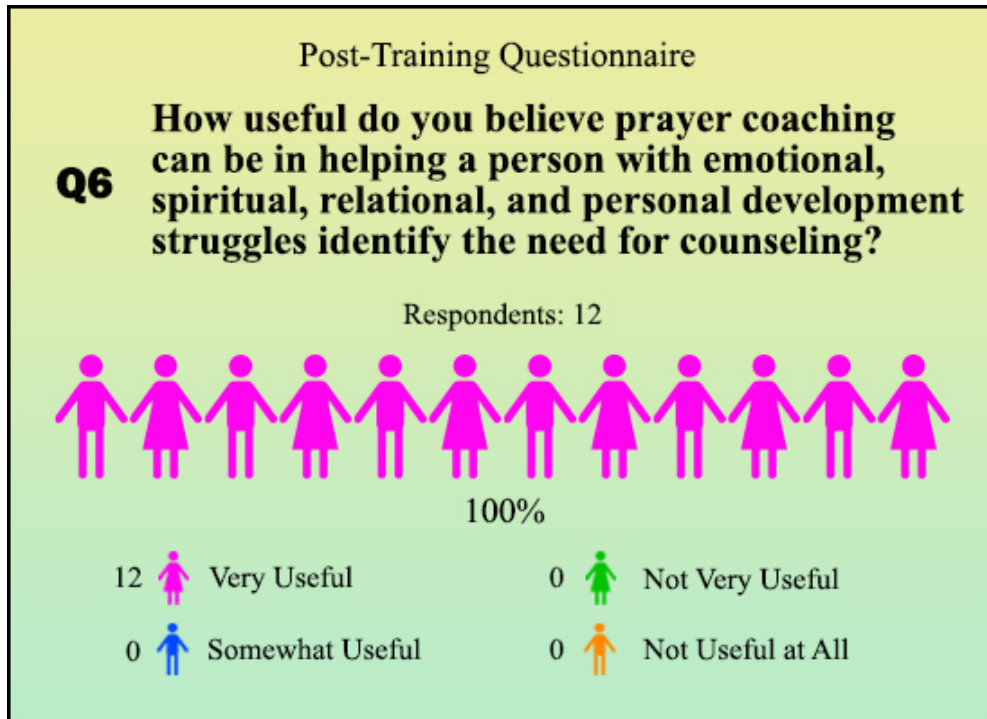


Figure 6: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Six

A component of the Living Prayer coaching process is to help people understand that emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles are normal for those approaching life from the world's perspective, but that those who seek the Lord of the kingdom, and His thinking, will find relief. LPC training teaches lay helpers to identify the condition of being stuck in struggles and help people understand the necessity of seeking additional support. One hundred percent of respondents understood Living Prayer coaching as including such a feature and believed it useful in helping people seek next-level support. The LPC training was

intentional in its effort to inform participants that one of their roles is to be a First Prayer Responder for people who might potentially experience struggles related to the reasons for their prayer requests. The “very useful” response by 100% of respondents indicated that all participants understood LPCs as front-line support for struggling members of Lake Church. Furthermore, they understood their role as a helping mechanism of the counseling department.

Question 7

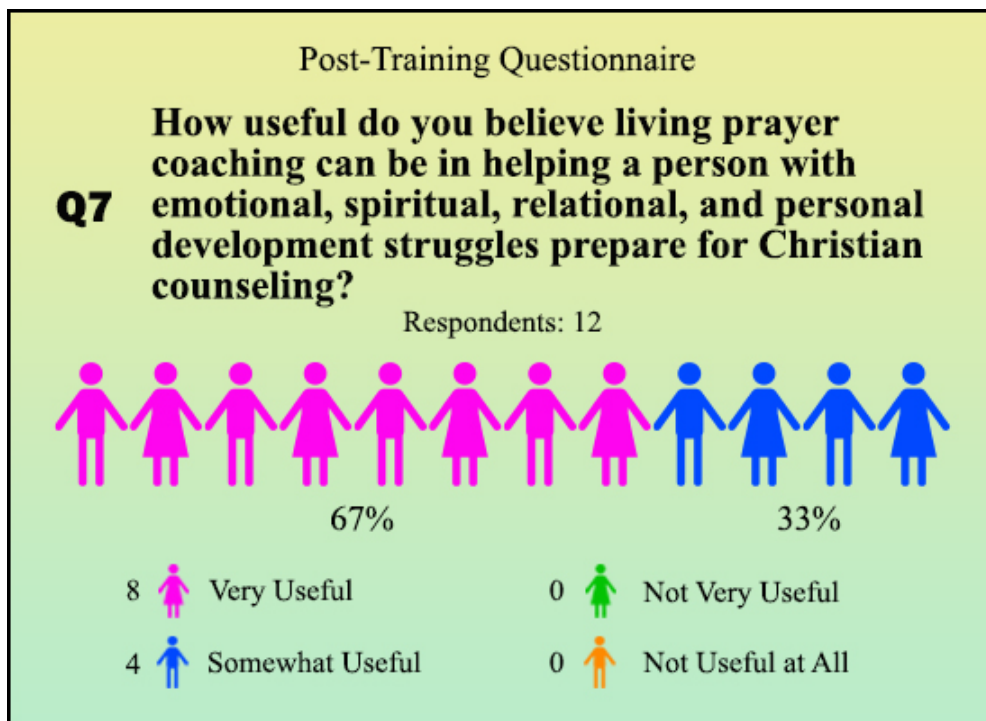


Figure 7: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Seven

The primary objective of the associated quality improvement project was to develop a group of lay helpers capable of sharing, coaching, or training Lake Church members to seek the Lord’s help with emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. The more members who seek the Lord in times of struggle, the higher the possibility that those entering formal counseling will have already begun seeking the Lord’s help with their struggle. Question 7 sought to evaluate the training’s effectiveness in teaching participants the value of Living

Prayer coaching as a preparatory measure for those who eventually transition to formal counseling. Respondents considered the initial contact between a counselee and a counselor who practices Living Prayer as an initial approach to adjustment. As part of the training, participants learned that, in Christian counseling, connecting with the Lord is the first approach initiated for every condition.

Respondents to Question 7 evaluated the preparatory value of Living Prayer coaching for those experiencing the initial stages of struggle who would later enter formal counseling. Eight respondents (67%) strongly believed that Living Prayer coaching would positively affect individual preparation for formal counseling, based on their “very useful” selection. Such a response does not indicate that the respondent believed they are one of the Living Prayer Coaches who can help facilitate the initiative, just that the approach is useful. Furthermore, 33% also believe there was at least some possibility that Living Prayer coaching could result in a better initiation into formal counseling.

Question 8

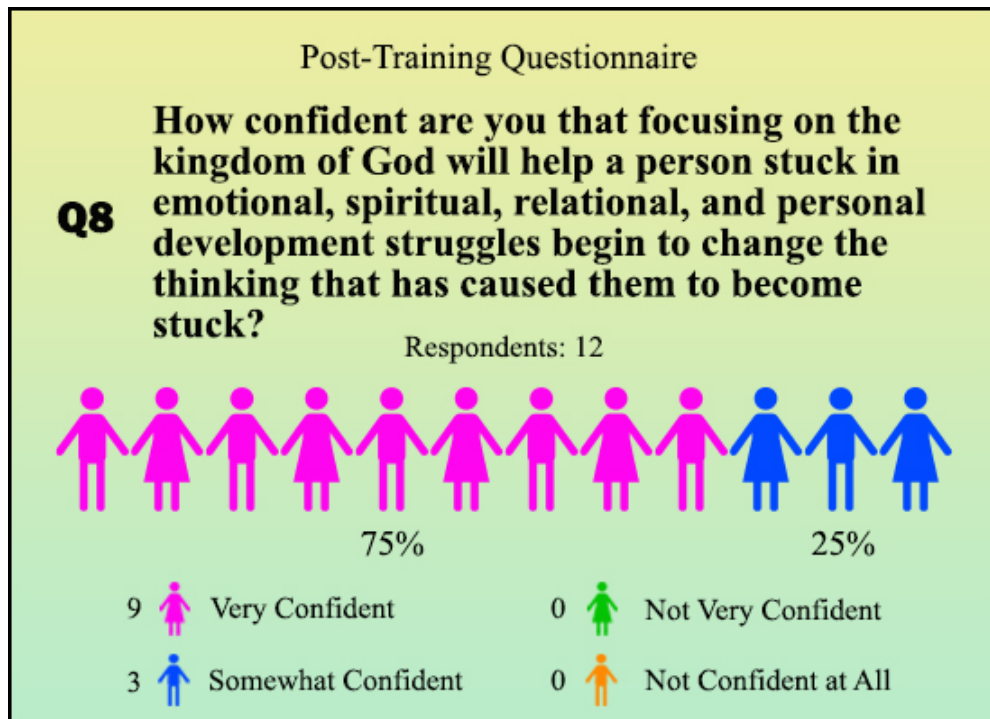


Figure 8: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Eight

The Living Prayer training acknowledged that people focused on the flawed thinking of the world often struggle with the results of disequilibrium with the Lord and His way of approaching life and relationships. Included was an assertion that people guided by the corrupt and chaotic nature of the world will develop a corrupt and chaotic way of thinking. Participants learned that adjustment happens when one returns to God and learns to adjust how they approach every aspect of life by studying how God thinks. The place where God reigns and Christians seek to be more like Him is known as the Kingdom of God.

Those responding to the Post-Training Questionnaire had completed their training seminar minutes before beginning to answer the questions. Fresh on their minds was the teaching that if one focuses on kingdom thinking, the chaos and confusion associated with the world will begin to subside and eventually cease to influence their thinking. As a result, a stuck person will

begin moving away from worldly thinking and start the adjustment process. Nine respondents (75%) were confident that persons refocusing their attention away from the world and on the kingdom of God would find relief from their struggles. The researcher was able to evaluate the effectiveness of the training in influencing agreement with the premise of the question through the positive responses. The same is also possible for the three respondents (25%) who indicated that they were somewhat confident that kingdom focus could change thinking and help one become unstuck.

Question 9

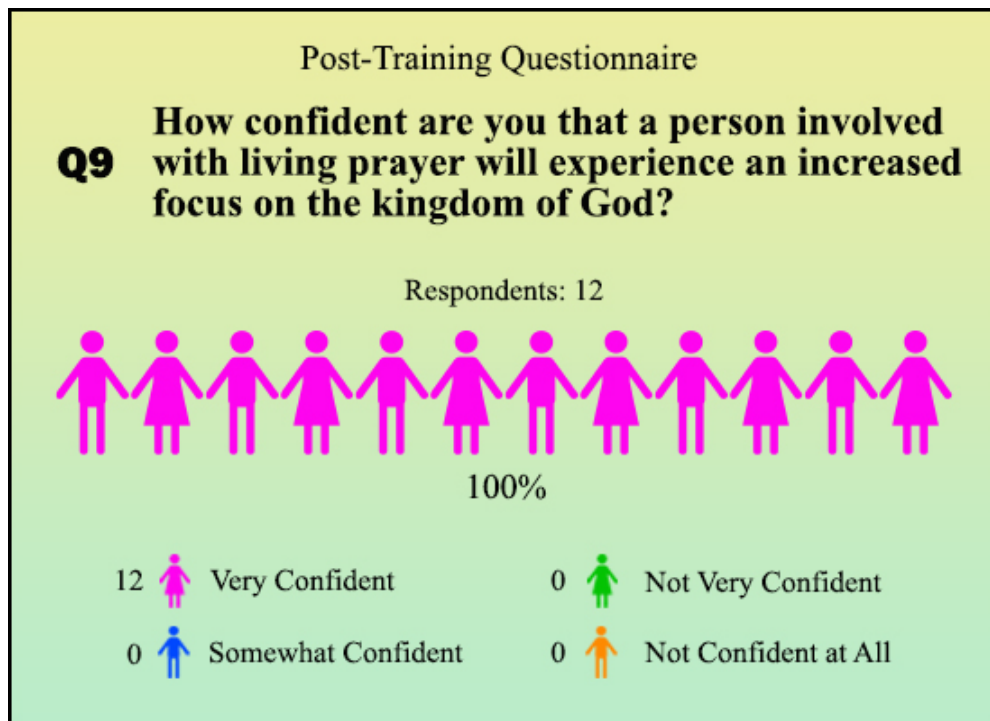


Figure 9: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Nine

Question 9 was the most critical question for evaluating the effectiveness of the Living Prayer training. The question served as a test to determine if the participants made a real connection to the Living Prayer concept. Participants approached the question from a personal and external perspective since the question asked about anyone involved with Living Prayer. One

hundred percent of respondents believe that Living Prayer functions as a device for causing one to focus on the kingdom. Therefore, when an LPC notices another person's need to get closer to the kingdom of God, they will more likely share, teach, or coach a person to use Living Prayer to create movement toward the kingdom.

Responses to Question 9 were not indicative of an exclusive and absolute belief that Living Prayer would facilitate movement away from a stuck condition. The question design focused on the respondents' opinion of Living Prayer's function as a tool capable of causing one to focus on the kingdom. Considering responses to question 8, not all respondents who believed Living Prayer moves one closer to the kingdom, had an absolute belief that the condition of being stuck is guaranteed to improve if moved toward kingdom thinking. Being moved toward the kingdom and having acquired kingdom thinking are two different experiences. However, the slight variation of opinion on Living Prayer's absolute ability to help one begin changing their flawed thinking is not enough to expect the four LPCs identified in question 8 to refrain from sharing, teaching, or coaching people to use Living Prayer. Overall, everyone believed that Living Prayer could move one toward the kingdom and begin to change the way one thinks.

Question 10

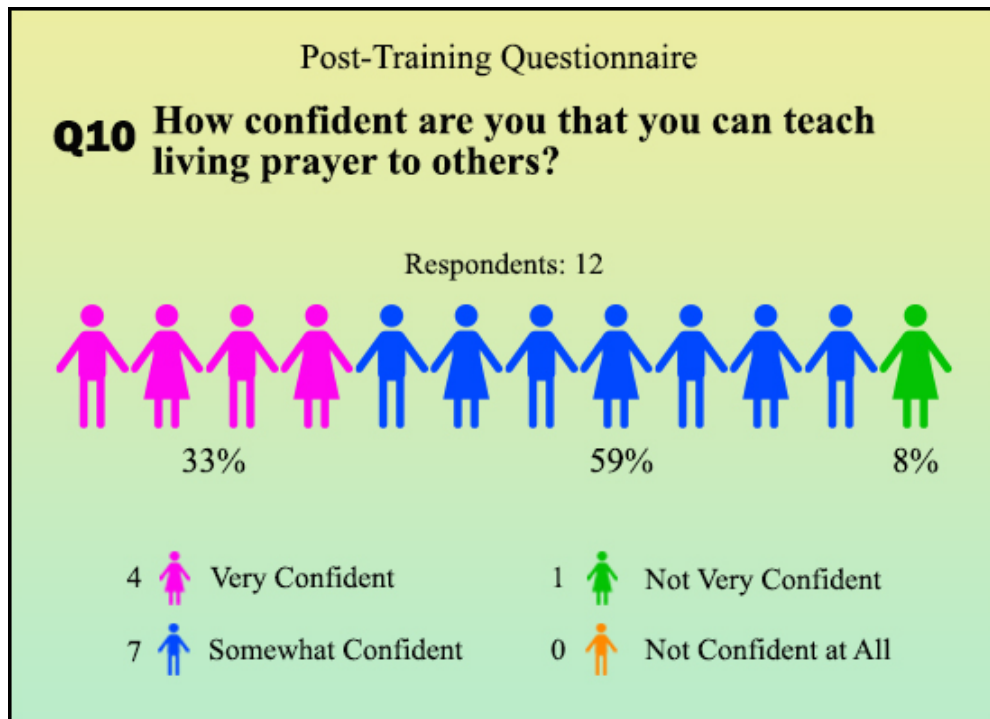


Figure 10: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Ten

The effort of this action research project was to take a group of existing Lake Church lay leaders and add an additional tool to their abilities that they can use to better minister to those they serve. The researcher informed the participants that they would be considered lay helpers trained to help those suffering from certain struggles seek the Lord's help with adjustment. The associated training intended to teach a group of leaders, who would be known as LPCs, to teach only the concept of Living Prayer to others. Although the researchers desired that every member of Lake Church learn Living Prayer, only the original twelve participants were to become coaches.

Question 10 asked the participant to put themselves in the role of teacher. Participant responses to Question 10 allowed the researcher to evaluate the training's ability to inspire others to accept their own ability to teach Living Prayer to others. Although the question did not ask the

respondents to indicate their ability to teach others to become LPCs, many respondents may have understood the question as indicating a duplicate effort, which will be a consideration in Phase 2 of the intervention. Others likely understood the question as it was asked, which was to teach others about Living Prayer, not teach them to become LPCs.

Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they would be able to teach Living Prayer to others, suggesting that the material was understandable and met their perceived ability to teach. Fifty-nine percent of respondents were only somewhat confident that they could teach Living Prayer. The lower confidence level may have been due to the training’s somewhat complicated theoretical component. Perhaps some respondents were uncomfortable teaching curricula that sat outside their professional expertise or academic training. One individual, representing only 8% of the respondents, responded, “Not Very Confident.”

Question 11

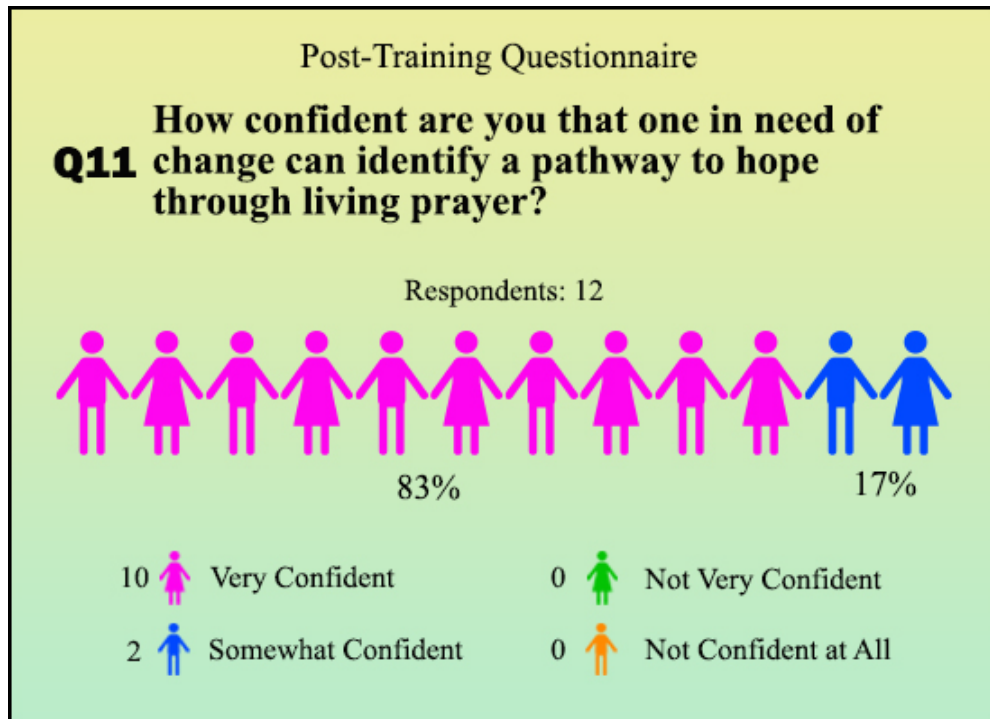


Figure 11: Post-Training Questionnaire Results; Question Eleven

Questions 2 and 3 identified that participants agreed that both hope and prayer are needed when the goal is adjustment from life's struggles. Question 11 also sought to identify respondents' opinions, this time, regarding Living Prayer's function in the adjustment process. During the training, participants learned, in part, that Living Prayer is a tool for engaging with God to identify hope. So, in the simplest terms, Living Prayer is a tool for praying and receiving from God what He wants one to know, to identify the pathway to the hope needed for adjustment. Living Prayer asserts that one adjusts when thinking ceases to be influenced by the world, and kingdom thinking takes over.

Questions 8 and 9 indicated that all participants believe that Living Prayer can move one toward the kingdom of God and that the kingdom's influence on thinking can help one adjust from life's struggles. The LPCs trained through this intervention seem to agree that a pathway to change is found in Living Prayer's ability to move one toward the hope found in the kingdom of God. Of course, it is not Living Prayer doing the moving, but the Lord, as one continuously communicates with Him to move from their current place to a place of correction in His kingdom.

Phase Two Questionnaire Responses

At the end of the four-week trial period, participants completed the Post-Trial Period Questionnaire (Appendix G). The Post-Trial Period Questionnaire was a paper and pencil type survey emailed to each of the twelve participants on the last day of the trial period. Participants received instructions to print the survey, complete it, and turn it in on the following day at church service. One person could not print the survey, so they were given a printed copy of the survey the morning of the church service to complete and turn in according to the instructions.

Ten surveys were turned in on Sunday as requested, and two were submitted late, but within the unpublished deadline of one week after the final submission date. Those participants who turned in their surveys on Sunday as requested, did so by placing them in the receptacle provided with their PIN written at the top of their form. Of those who turned in their surveys late, one submitted via email and the other using photographs attached to SMS texts sent to the researcher. The late surveys were printed and added to the rest of the surveys for processing. The researcher transferred the response data to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Questions 1-3

The purpose of the so-called trial period was to allow participants an opportunity to continue to study the study guide and notes they took at the Living Prayer Seminar while engaging their usual associates in their natural ministry contexts. They were assigned the tasks of reading the entire Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide to remind them of what they learned during the Living Prayer Seminar and complete the included worksheets. The researcher believed there was a better chance that the participants would intentionally employ what they learned in their personal lives and ministry if they had a reason to remain engaged with the training material.

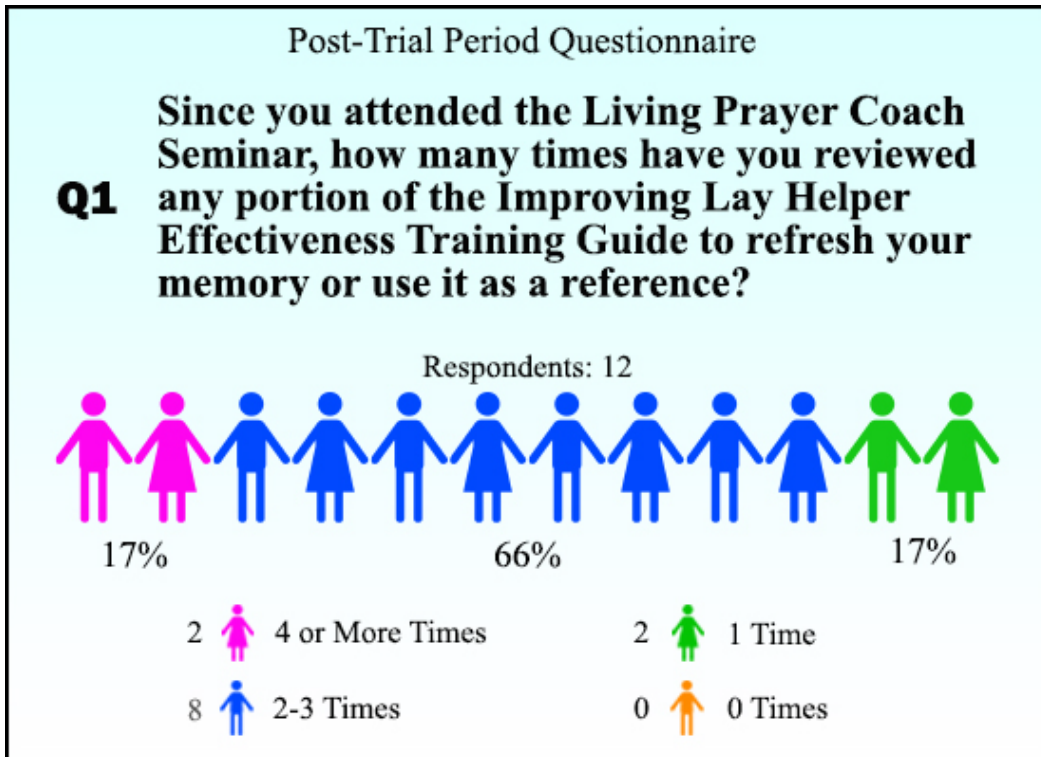


Figure 12: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question One

Question 1. Question 1 resulted in only two people (17%) referencing their copy of the Improving Living Prayer Effectiveness Training Guide four or more times. However, eight people (66%) reported referencing their training guide 2-3 times. Two participants (17%) reported that they had only referenced their copy of the training guide once, with no respondents indicating that they had not engaged the training guide at all.

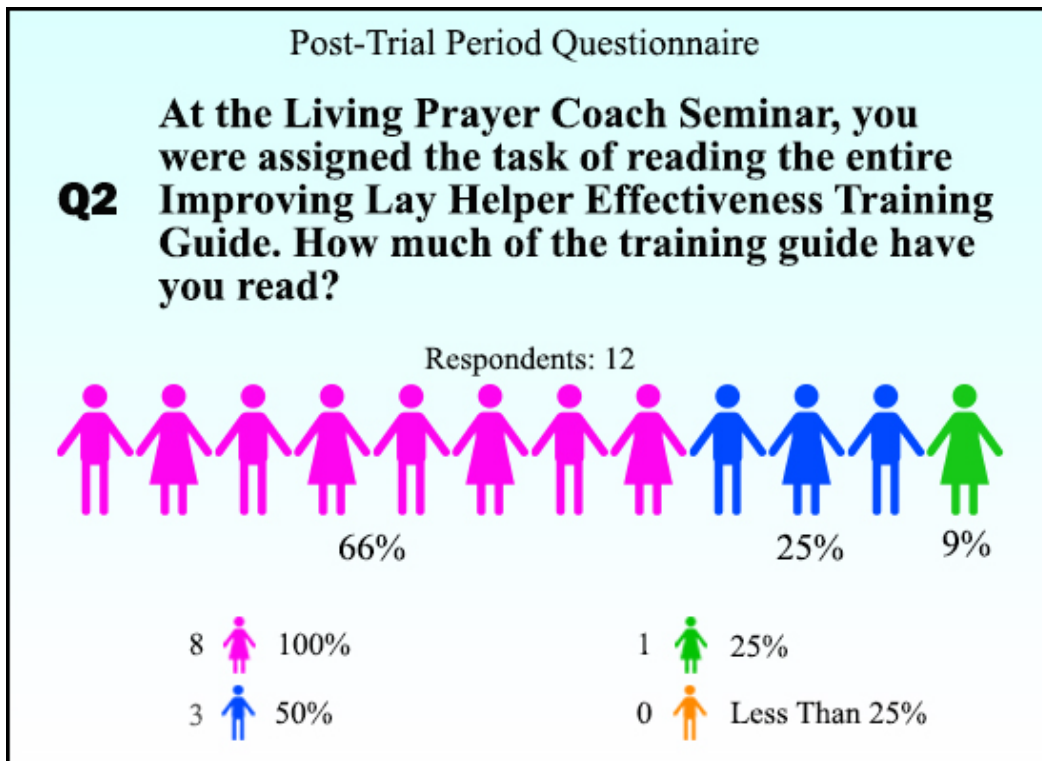


Figure 13: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Two

Question 2. The amount of information provided during the four-hour training seminar was fast paced, so the researcher provided a mechanism that would allow participants a chance to pick up on anything they missed or remind themselves of key points. The researcher also desired to provide participants an opportunity to evaluate the training material. The researcher instructed participants to read the entire Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide to allow them to consume its content at their own pace. Question 2 allowed the researcher to see how many participants took full advantage of the additional opportunity to learn and prepare to share Living Prayer with others.

Table 1.

Responses to Post-Trial Questionnaire questions 1-3 for comparison.

Participant PIN	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
1113	4 or more times	100%	50%
1749	2-3 Times	100%	100%
2148	2-3 Times	100%	50%
2184	4 or more times	100%	50%
6271	2-3 Times	100%	100%
5377	2-3 Times	100%	100%
3674	1 Time	100%	< 25%
9777	2-3 Times	100%	100%
9211	2-3 Times	50%	< 25%
2221	2-3 Times	50%	< 25%
3226	2-3 Times	50%	25%
7912	1 Time	25%	25%

The data showed that 66% of respondents reported that they read 100% of the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide during the trial period. According to the data, only one of the participants who read 100% of the training guide had only referred to the training guide one time, indicating that they read the guide in one sitting. Of the others who reported having read 100% of the guide, five participants referred to it 2-3 times, and two referred to it four or more times. Although this data does not necessarily indicate that those who read 100% of the guide took more than one sitting to read it through, seven of those eight participants who read the entire contents (87.5%) referred to it more than twice, and two of the seven, four or more times. The data indicates that those who read only 50% of the guide referred to it 2-3 times. Only one participant reported reading only 25% of the guide, and no one reported reading none.

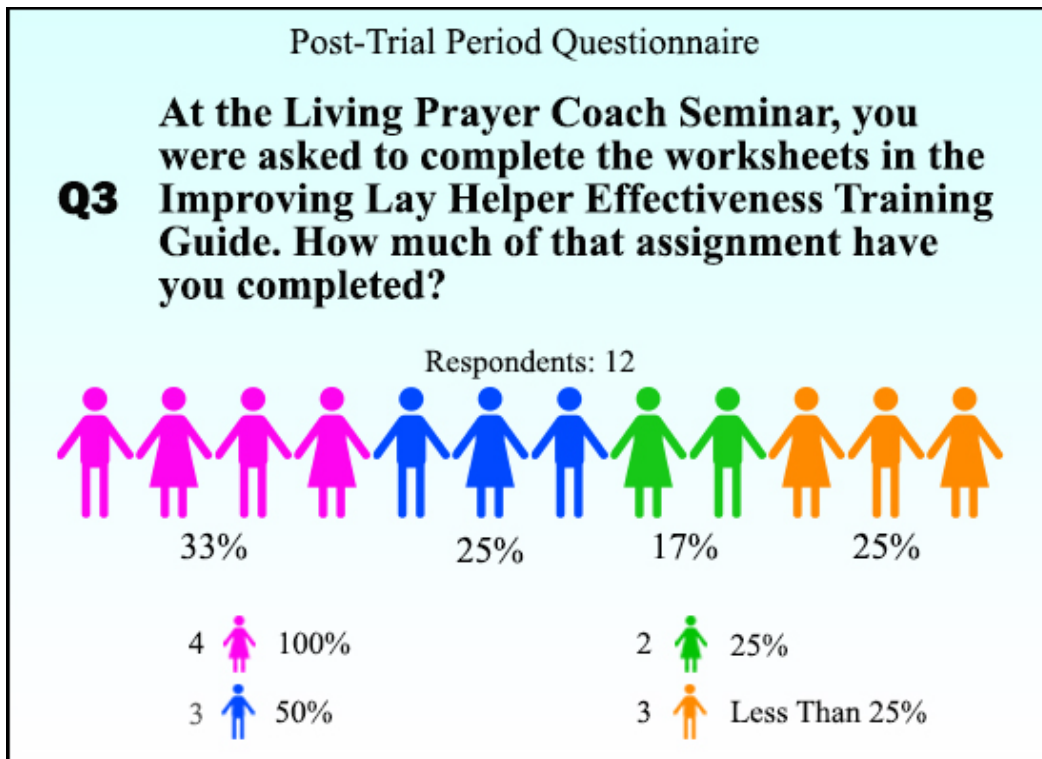


Figure 14: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Three

Question 3. The worksheet component of the trial period independent learning process also planned to draw the participant back into the material. Specifically, the associated worksheet’s purpose was to cause the participant to consider using Living Prayer in possible circumstances that they have experienced with the people to whom they minister or otherwise associate. Only four participants (33%) reported having completed the whole worksheet assignment, with 3 completing 50% and 2 completing only 25%. Three participants reported that they completed only 25% of the assignment or less, which may have included having 0% of the assignment.

Question 4

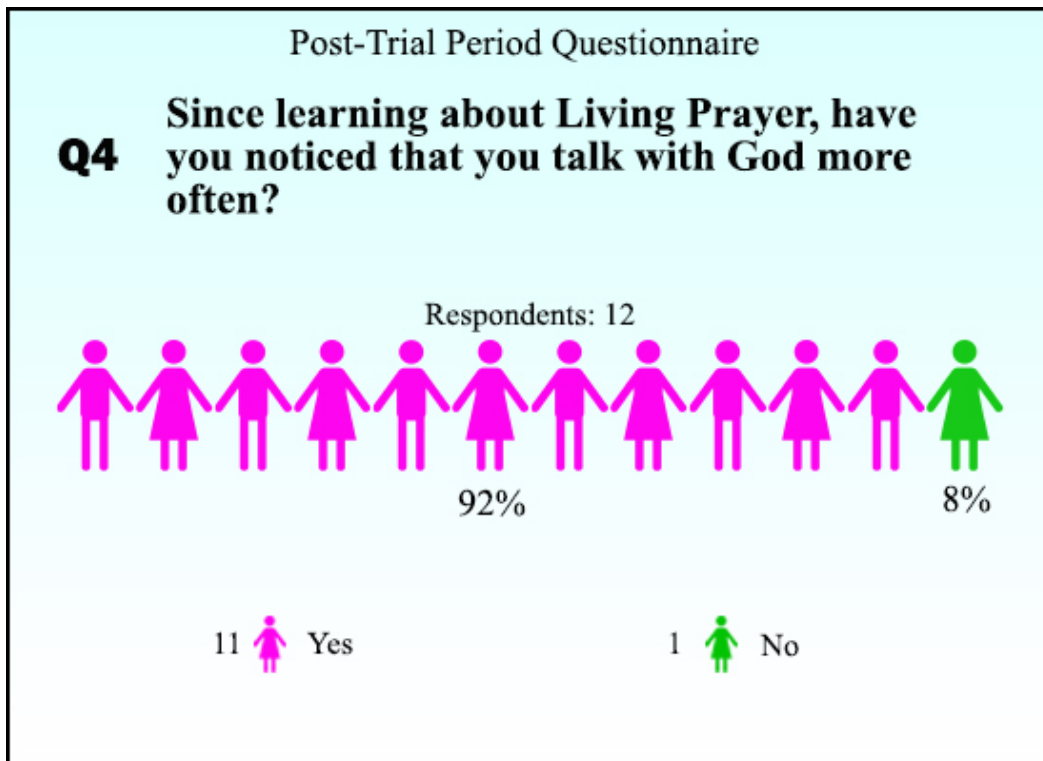


Figure 15: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Four

The researcher was explicitly interested in discovering the value of the Living Prayer training in helping even those who are experienced prayer team members give more time to God. The prayer team concept is that members will pray specifically for prayer requests as they are submitted and mindfully include those prayer initiatives that are assigned from time to time to their regular or personal prayer times. Such a responsibility to pray increases how often a Lake Church prayer team member prays, but this does not necessarily commit a prayer team member to the 1 Thessalonians 5:17 requirement to pray without ceasing.

When asked if they gave more time to God after learning about Living Prayer, 11 respondents (92%) said they have spoken to God more often since their LPC training. Only 1 respondent reported that they had not noticed communicating with God any more often due to their training. Such a response may indicate that the training did not positively affect that

particular participant or that they already understood the value of 1 Thessalonians 5:17. In either case, the training seems to have positively affected most participants.

Question 5

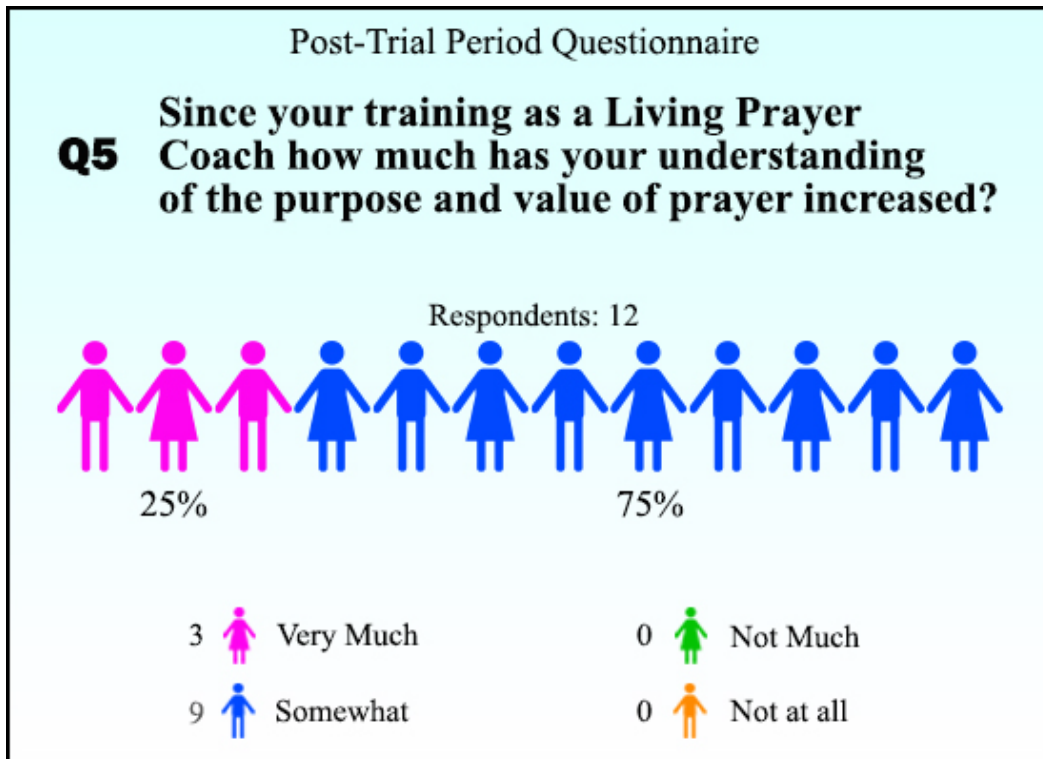


Figure 16: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Five

Praying more simply because one is told to do so does not indicate anything other than obedience. The strong response to Question 4 may indicate agreement with the LPC instructor that God requires unceasing prayer but does not indicate that learning happened during the training. Question 5 seeks to understand if a portion of the positive responses to Question 4 also had to do with the training. Only three (25%) of the respondents reported that the training caused an increased knowledge of the purpose and value of prayer, while the balance indicated that the training provided some increase in their knowledge of the purpose and value of prayer.

Question 6

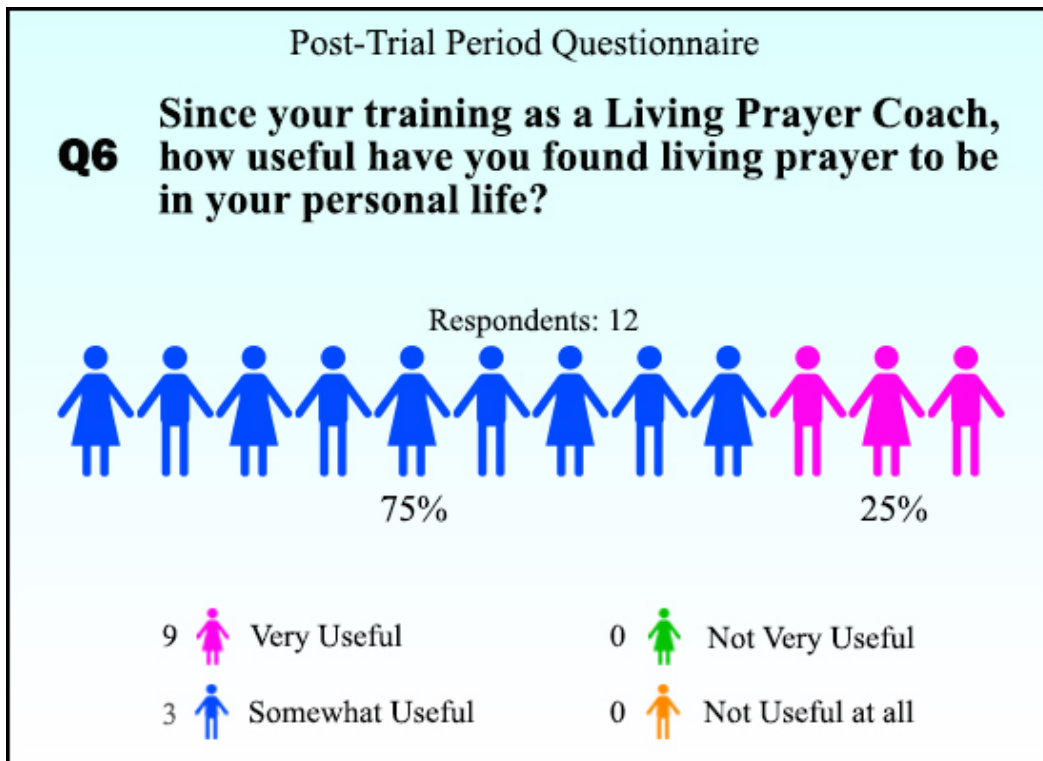


Figure 17: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Six

Question 6 identifies that, for the most part, prayer team members believe they have a strong understanding of the purpose and value of prayer, as represented in the responses to question 5, but were still able to learn and benefit from their participation in the LPC training. The LPC training did not teach anything new about the theological aspects of prayer, and the researcher expected that Lake Church prayer team members would not have received any new theological knowledge through the training. The researcher was seeking to discover through Question 6 whether participants would learn new reasons to pray and how to make the Living Prayer concept their personal gateway to a more focused kingdom lifestyle.

Although the responses to this question do not specifically elaborate on what the training contributed to the participants' lives, 75% of them found something in the concept that added to their personal prayer life. Of the respondents, 25% of them also found some value in the training

that added to their prayer life, a lesser value than the majority. The researcher also considered that even though prayer team members are in a group responsible for prayer, the members may not have any better grasp of the concepts of prayer, and certainly Living Prayer, than any other church member. Those who must testify to the value of Living Prayer should be able to relate to it from a personal perspective. Question 6 identifies that 100% of the participants can speak to the personal value Living Prayer has in their lives.

Question 7

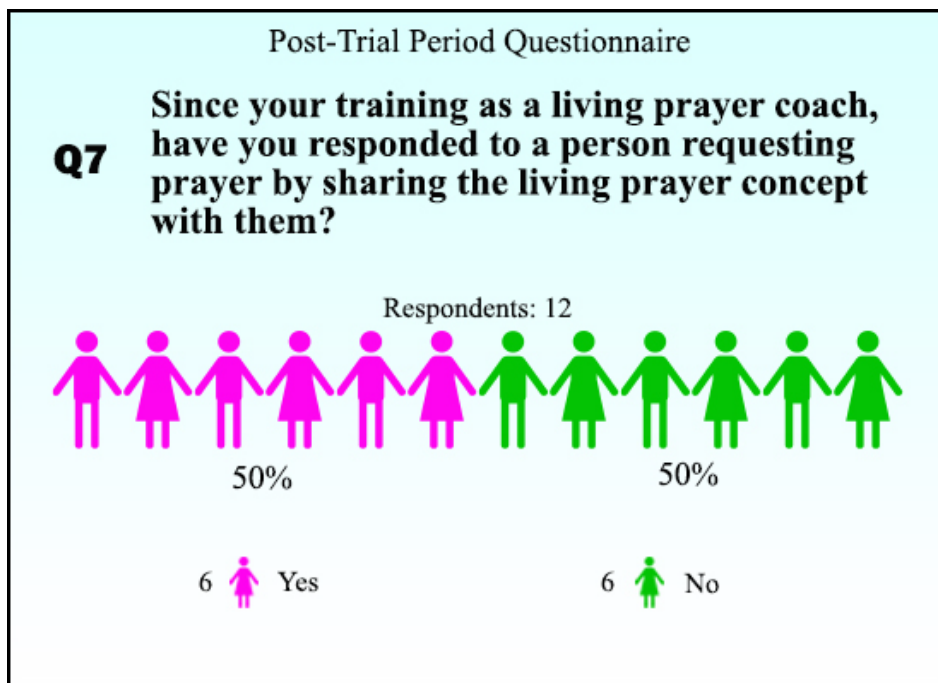


Figure 18: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Seven

Prayer team members understand that it is common for persons experiencing emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles to seek the support of the prayer team before any other ministry offering of Lake Church or outside services. The researcher understood that not all prayer team members receive direct requests for prayer and that not everyone trained in Living Prayer would change how they respond to people requesting prayer. Question 7 sought to identify how many trained LPCs would respond to prayer requesters at the time of their

request on how to use Living Prayer to communicate directly to God on behalf of their request. The responses to this question indicate that during the four-week trial period, 50% of the respondents had the opportunity and the willingness to share Living Prayer directly with requesters.

Question 8

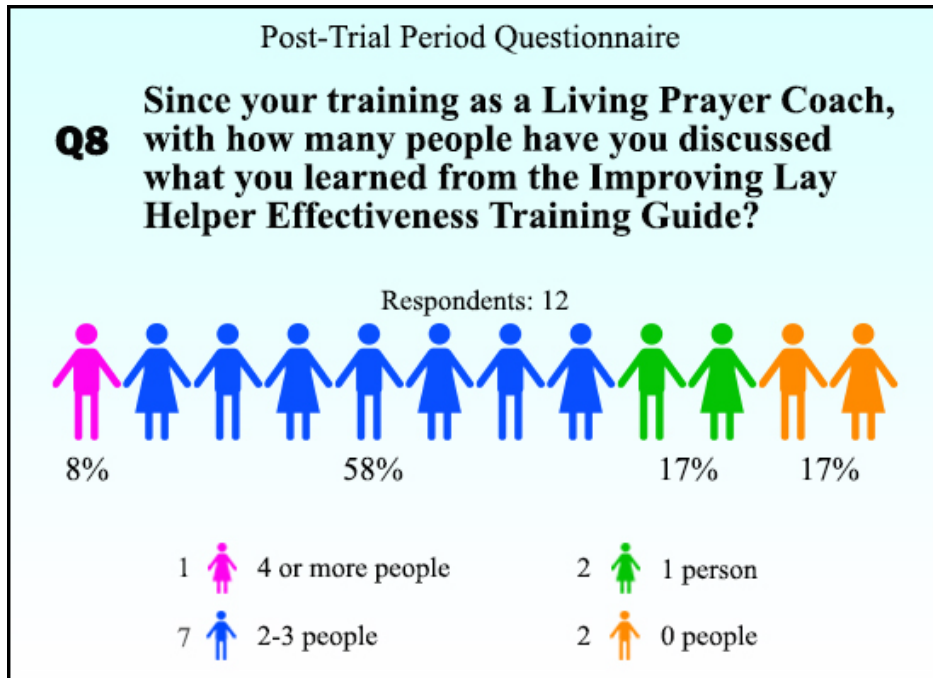


Figure 19: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Eight

The most important outcome expectation for this project was to build a team of LPCs who would eventually take the Living Prayer concept to every member of Lake Church. Question 8 intended to evaluate the sharing pace of the Living Prayer coaching team by identifying its effort during the trial period. According to the responses, one person shared the concept with four or more people; seven shared it with two to three people, two shared it with one person, and two did not share it with anyone. This report identifies that ten participants shared Living Prayer with a minimum of twenty people in four weeks, and an addition of 16% of Lake Church learned something about the Living Prayer concept. Including the participants of

this intervention, the total membership exposure to Living Prayer was, by the end of the trial period, 27%.

The researcher anticipated that there would be degrees of sharing by those who participated in the LPC training. Although the training was designed to develop a team of LPCs, the intervention design focused on improving the effectiveness of an existing group of church leaders, so they might share the Living Prayer concept with the members of Lake Church. A discussion does not constitute training as it relates to the intent of Question 8, but only indicates that the participant told a member of their family, a friend, a ministry or social acquaintance, or a person requesting prayer, about Living Prayer. Such a discussion constitutes exposure to Living Prayer and, therefore, can be understood as having begun the process of sharing Living Prayer with the congregation. However, the question's results do not indicate the degree of understanding that each exposed member took from their discussion, only that the concept was shared.

Question 9

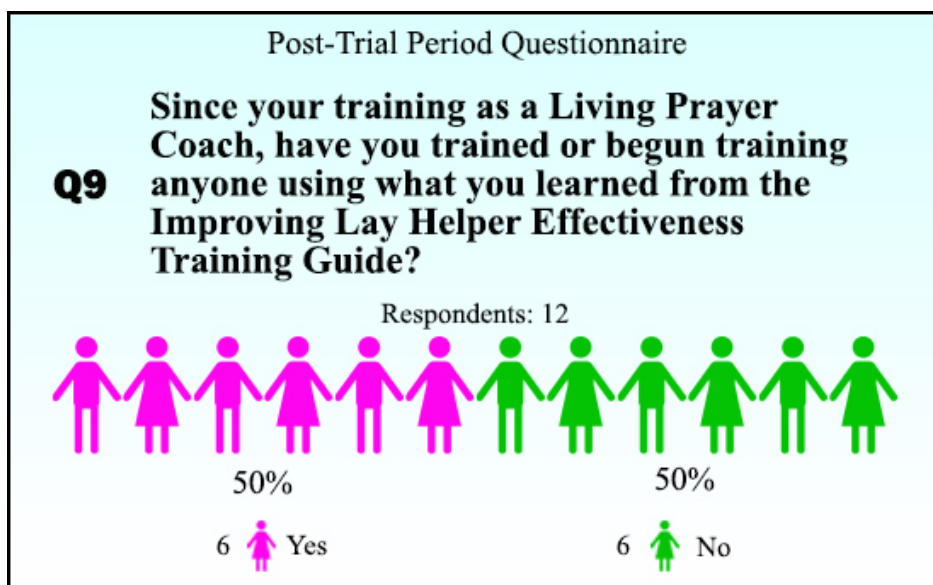


Figure 20: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Nine

There is a difference between exposure through discussion and Living Prayer training using the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide. When an LPC teaches someone using the same resources from which they learned, duplication of knowledge occurs. Where the results of Question 8 could not indicate the quality of the exposure to Living Prayer, Question 9 was able to do so. By teaching from the training guide, participants provided similar training quality as the initial training they received.

Six respondents identified that they had begun teaching others about Living Prayer using the training guide, which indicates that new trainees would learn about the concept's theological, theoretical, and practical aspects. Trainees had an opportunity to identify the value of hope in adjustment, how prayer leads one away from worldly thinking, and how Living Prayer functions as a tool of spiritual formation to help people adjust from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles.

Question 10

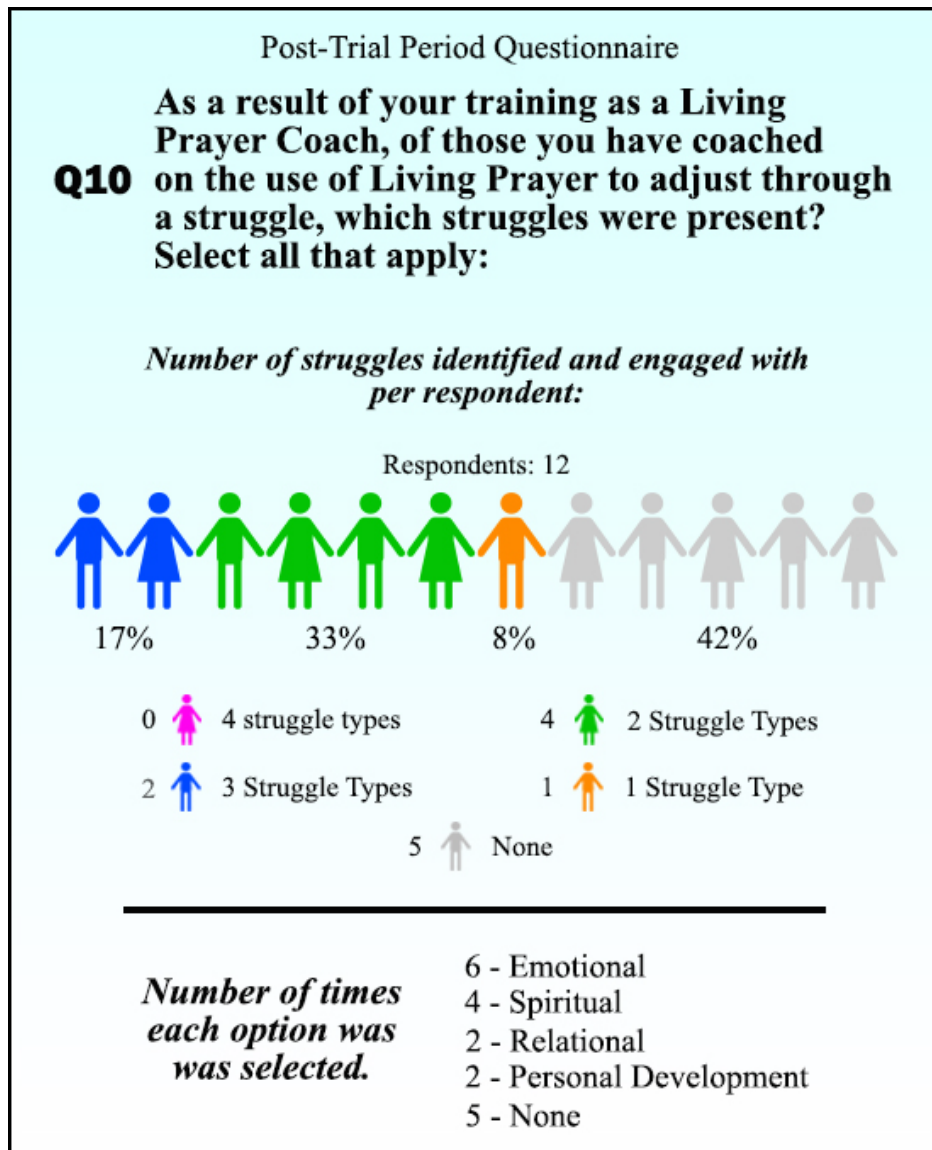


Figure 21: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Ten

The researcher anticipated that some participants would enter the intervention with existing knowledge about life’s struggles. The training intended to inform participants that prayer requests often have embedded indicators of emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles. For those who entered the training knowledgeable about the existence and results of struggles, the training served as a refresher and directed them to prayer requests to

discover embedded struggles. Less knowledgeable participants also had an opportunity to learn about and embrace the material on life’s struggles for use in an LPC context.

Active Living Prayer Coaches selected all that applied from a list of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. The results showed that participants encountered emotional struggles six times, spiritual struggles four times, and relational and personal development struggles twice each. Five respondents reported that they had not encountered any of the identified struggles. Of those who identified as not having encountered any specific struggles, 100% had also indicated that they had not shared Living Prayer with anyone requesting prayer (Question 7). A response of “none” did not indicate that they had not prayed with anyone, just that they had not coached anyone with whom they prayed.

Question 11

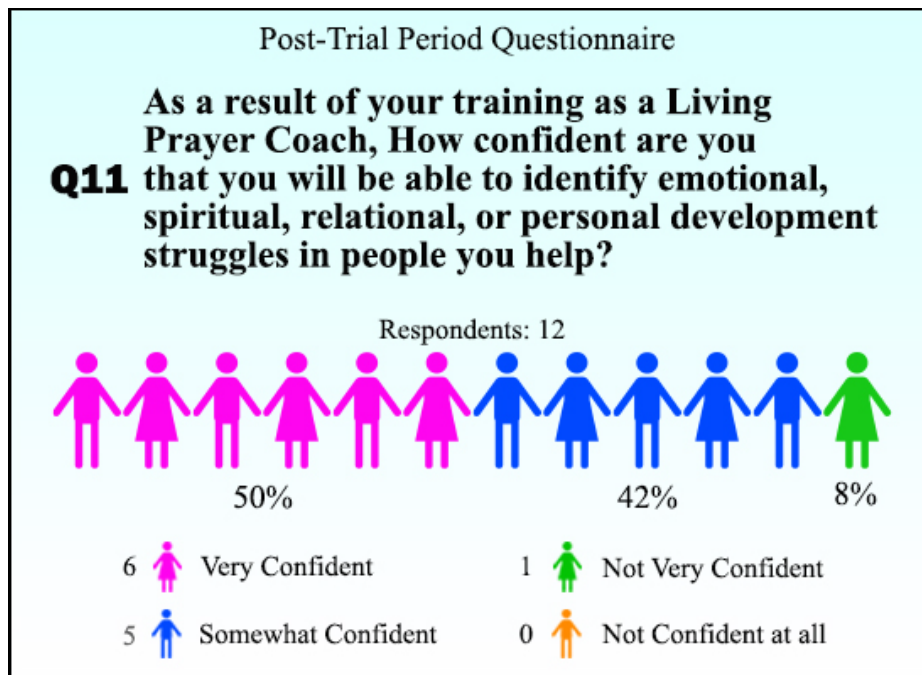


Figure 22: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Eleven

Question 11 does not acknowledge the respondent as an LPC, only that they received the associated training. The question posed intended to evaluate participant perception regarding the

training’s ability to teach one how to identify emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. The question does, however, insinuate that the participant will be a helper to those suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. Half (50%) of the respondents reported being very confident that the training was sufficient in preparing them to identify the struggles, five were somewhat confident, and one was not very confident.

Questions 12 and 13

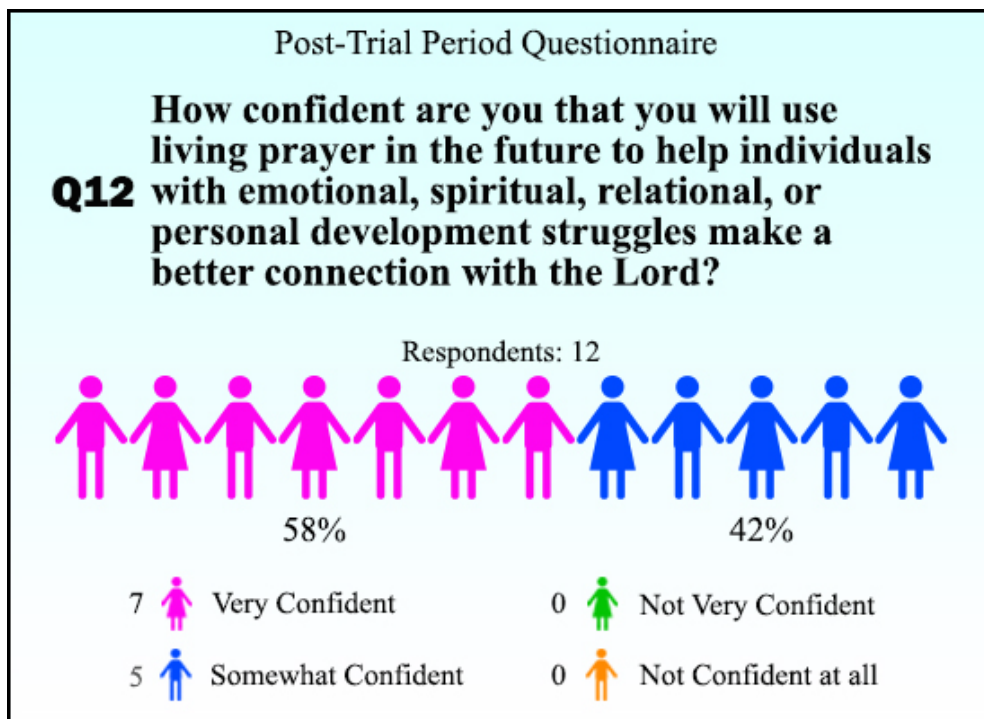


Figure 23: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Twelve

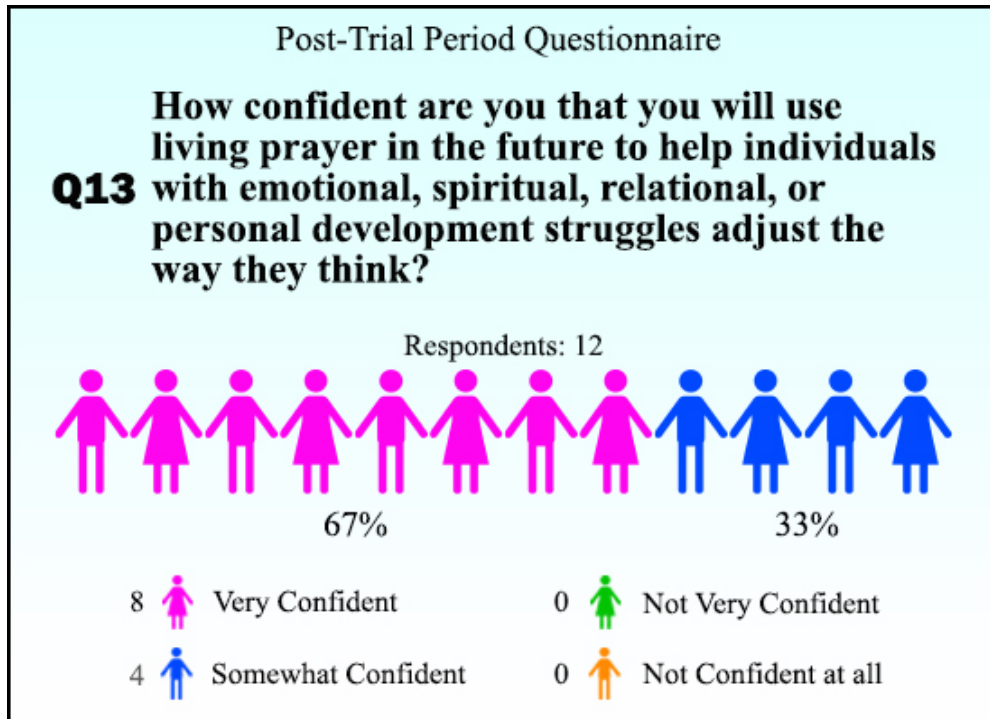


Figure 24: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Thirteen

Questions 12 and 13 relate specifically to one’s confidence in future service as a LPC. Questions 12 and 13 are follow-up questions regarding the training’s assertion that those stuck in struggle fail to adjust because their relationship with the Lord is weak, and the world can corrupt their thinking. LPCs learned to help people strengthen their relationship with the Lord, so He could guide them to, or help them return to, kingdom thinking. The question addressed whether participants had confidence in their ability to engage a struggling person with Living Prayer and that, given the opportunity, they would be willing and feel well equipped to do so.

As it related to helping a struggling person better relate to or better connect with the Lord (Question 12), seven participants (58%) indicated that they were very confident they would use their Living Prayer skills for the stated purpose. The remaining five participants (42%) identified that they were somewhat confident in the same. As it related to serving as an LPC to help a

struggling person change their thinking, eight respondents (67%) answered that they were very confident that they would use Living Prayer coaching skills to help one stuck in struggle begin to correct their flawed thinking, while only four respondents (33%) were only somewhat confident.

Question 14

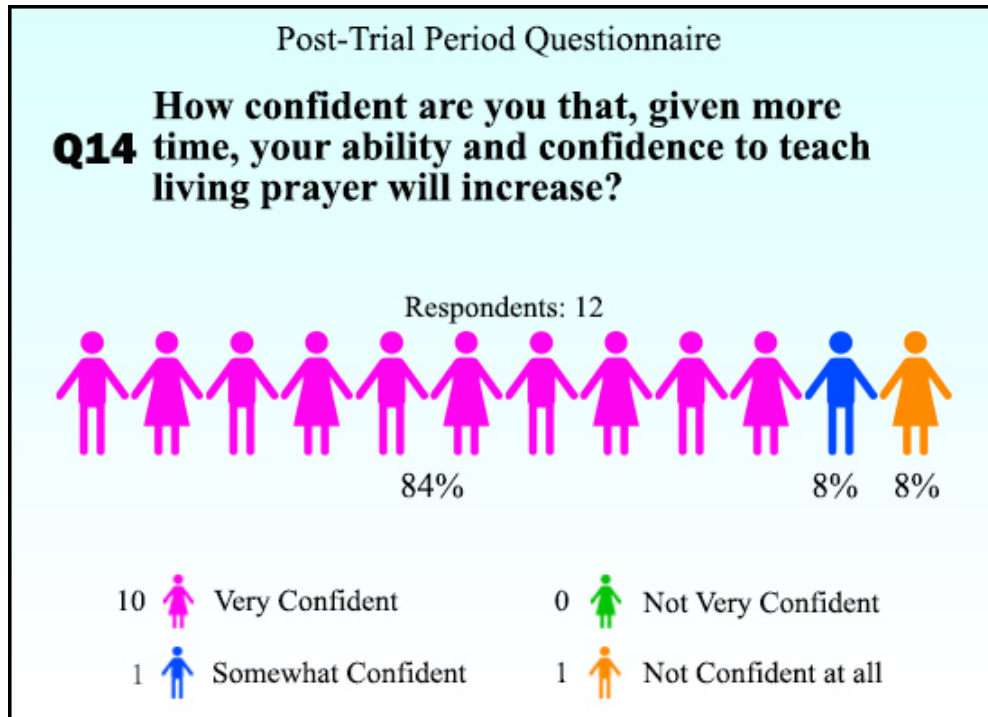


Figure 25: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Fourteen

Question 14 is a follow-up to Question 9, which asked participants to identify if they had started training others about Living Prayer using the Improving Lay Helper Effectiveness Training Guide. Of those respondents, only 50% indicated that they had begun developing a next layer of Living Prayer-informed lay helpers. The researcher knew that not all participants would be immediately ready to duplicate themselves as LPCs after only a short time. Since the expected outcome of the quality improvement project is that all Lake Church members learn about Living Prayer, the researcher included a question that provided him some insight into the project's future.

For the intervention to succeed long-term, LPCs must duplicate themselves by training others. By the end of the four-week trial period, 27% of church members had learned or learned of Living Prayer through the training seminar or from trained LPCs. The responses to Question 14 inform the researcher that at least ten participants are very confident that they will get better at teaching Living Prayer to others over time, and one person was somewhat confident that he or she will do the same. The results indicate a potential increase of active LPCs teaching Living Prayer with an increase from 50% to 92%, representing a net increase of 42%.

Question 15

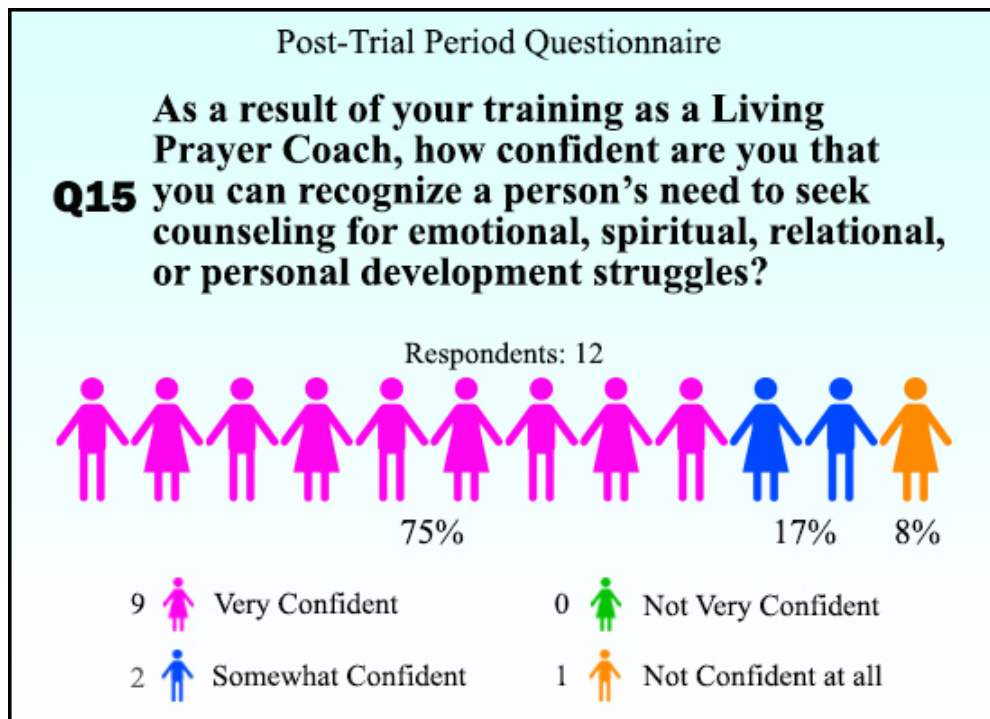


Figure 26: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Fifteen

The term *First Prayer Responder* was purposely used during the Living Prayer seminar to elucidate the purpose of Living Prayer coaching to participants. Participants understood that their primary responsibilities included identifying how the reasons behind member prayer requests affected their well-being, recognizing the potential for or existence of related struggles, and helping the struggling member reach to God for the support they need to move from their

current place to the safety of the kingdom of God. Participants learned to identify the types of struggles they should look out for and that their initial intervention with a struggling member may be a prerequisite activity for future counseling that would likely be Christ-centered and focused on adjustment through kingdom thinking.

Question 11 evaluated participant confidence regarding their ability to identify the existence of or potential for the particular types of struggles they could expect to see in the church context. Question 15 asked the participant to consider the next level of Living Prayer coaching to help the struggling member identify the need for formal counseling. Of those responding to Question 11, 11 (92%) were at least somewhat confident that they would be able to recognize emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles. Concerning the ability to recognize a struggling member's need to seek counseling for one of the indicated struggles, nine respondents identified as being very confident, and two said they were somewhat confident. The participant who selected "not confident at all" when responding to Question 11, also responded "not confident at all" to Question 15. Nevertheless, most participants, 92%, identified as having confidence that they could both recognize the type of struggle a member may face and identify the need for counseling.

Question 16



Figure 27: Post-Trial Period Questionnaire Results; Question Sixteen

It is valuable for Lake Church members to have available prayer team members trained as LPCs who can provide a direct response to those experiencing the onset of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. It is also essential for the Living Prayer concept of improving thinking and behavior by focusing on the kingdom of God to permeate the Lake Church culture. As previously mentioned, each prayer team member selected for this quality improvement project also served as lay helpers, leaders, teachers, and directors of other Lake Church ministries.

Question 16 asked participants to reflect on their additional ministry affiliations and determine if they have had enough Lay Helper Effectiveness training to include the Living Prayer concept in those other activities. Respondents overwhelmingly expressed their belief that they had received enough training to include the Living Prayer concept in their current ministry

endeavors. Remaining consistent with the responses relating to participants' confidence to perform as LPCs, 11 respondents (92%) also indicated that the training sufficiently trained participants to include the Living Prayer concept in their other ministry endeavors.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Purpose and Intervention Summary

The overarching purpose of this action research project was to offer Lake Church members a method they could use to become more focused on the kingdom of God and God's way of thinking. A deeper kingdom focus on the part of the membership will help prepare those who will, from time to time, need counseling to be prepared for the work. The method offered was called *Living Prayer*, a tool designed to help members develop a more focused kingdom lifestyle. The value to the members is that focused kingdom thinking can overcome the confusion associated with world-inspired thinking. Although everyone benefits when they learn to think more like the Lord, the primary beneficiaries of a program designed to improve thinking quality are those actively struggling from the world's influence. The kingdom's influence positively affects behavior and attitude by turning one's attention from the world's corruption to God's way of thinking.

For those not exclusively influenced by the kingdom of God, there is a potential for emotional, spiritual, relational, or personal development struggles associated with the world's influence. Without a system for communicating with the Lord to help one adjust from world-influenced thinking, individuals will likely struggle and become stuck in those struggles. Although they will not all seek formal counseling, most struggling people need assistance moving from being stuck to being free. It is common for members who struggle to remain committed to kingdom influence to bring their struggles to the Lake Church Counseling Center. All counselees entering formal counseling at Lake Church are directed to open a dialogue with

the Lord regarding their struggle, goals, and desired outcomes. However, many struggling members report to their first session grossly disconnected from kingdom thinking.

Often, new counselees lack the sort of relationship with the Lord that inspires hope in His ability to serve as an active participant in a team dedicated to reducing or eliminating the world's influence. For others, their struggles may have driven them to become distant or even angry with God, some going so far as to deny Him.¹⁴⁴ Many are either unaware or have lost touch with God's interest or willingness to work directly in partnership with them to affect positive change in their lives. Because of their weak relationship with the Lord, counselees often dismiss promptings to engage God continuously, as doing so is not a common practice in their life.

Because it is not a part of their spiritual process to communicate with the Lord continually, intentionally, and purposefully, the counselor must work to help the counselee form new habits in their prayer life. Helping counselees move from worldly thinking to kingdom thinking is immediately necessary, but retraining them at the beginning of counseling can delay the process. Such a delay can be detrimental to strategy execution and slow the pace of the adjustment process. Furthermore, recovering counselees are more likely to relapse into the condition attended to if they do not remain engaged with the Lord in the adjustment and maturation process over the long term.

The intervention associated with this project sought to train a group of existing lay leaders to help teach Living Prayer to members. Those who attended and completed the associated training are considered Living Prayer Coaches (LPC) and are free to teach Living Prayer to as many people as they see fit. The intervention did not include any specific plan to

¹⁴⁴ Marcia Webb, "'Forgiving' God: Reflections on Psychological Research Describing Spiritual Struggle," *Theology Today (Ephrata, Pa.)* 71, no. 3 (2014): 338-42, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0040573614542310>.

ensure that 100% of the members of Lake Church would eventually learn Living Prayer. Instead, the participants received instructions to share the approach with those they believed would benefit from it, such as those submitting prayer requests. Participants were also encouraged to use their training manuals to teach Living Prayer to others, representing the possibility of knowledge duplication. Between those talking about Living Prayer, teaching portions of it, and providing thorough training to others, there is a potential that many Lake Church members will become at least familiar with the concept.

Beneficiaries

Struggling Members

Lake Church members experiencing the onset of struggle that have not yet realized the need for counseling or those who have recognized their struggle, but have not yet reached out to the Lake Church counselors will benefit by receiving at least some Living Prayer instruction. Living Prayer instruction may serve as a primer for members entering counseling who need to join with the Lord for His correction. Counselees will be more willing to embrace Living Prayer as an adjustment tool if they are familiar with the concept. For those already familiar with Living Prayer as a tool, the counselor/counselee team will be able to blend the approach more effectively with other approaches to affect quality adjustment.

Members Subjected to the Influences of the World

A secondary benefit of having trained a group of lay helpers to use and teach Living Prayer is that members with a robust prayer life may be able to use the Living Prayer concept to mitigate the world's destructive influence. People equipped with a method to overcome the world, such as having a focused kingdom perspective, can rely on kingdom thinking to reduce the intensity of their struggles and adjust without needing counseling. Such a condition of self-

adjustment may lessen the burden on the counseling office and other helping outlets, providing more counselor availability for those suffering from the most severe struggles.

Lay Leadership

Finally, as the training subject, Living Prayer was relevant to the group of church leaders selected for the project. The relative effectiveness of the training may have been its ability to add a dimension of perceived efficacy for the lay helper. The curriculum's design intentionally applied to at least one of each leader's roles in the church. Since the participants were all Lake Church prayer team members, the expectations for one learning to use Living Prayer coaching did not require the participants to reimagine their ministry roles. As an aspect of their existing ministry roles, Lake Church prayer team members commonly engaged with those experiencing life struggles. Thus, they were in a place of proximal development, or readiness, to learn a next-level prayerful helping approach for those members. For the participants of this intervention, there was an identifiable aspect of relative growth in their understanding of prayer's effectiveness in helping struggling people adjust. Every participant acknowledged having benefited from the Living Prayer training and may find it valuable as they serve in their non-prayer team ministries.

Research Applications

For the Pastoral Counselor

The intervention design for this action research project focused on a particular problem associated with the condition of those members who entered formal counseling with the church's staff counselor. The intervention design included utilizing an existing group of church leaders to affect the change the researcher believed was necessary to address the stated problem affecting the counseling program. The design model of this intervention used existing church functions,

and the servants associated with them, to teach the congregation a concept the staff counselor believed they needed to learn.

A modified version of the model may be appropriate in other situations where the counseling office feels it necessary to do more than make a simple announcement or request a single sermon to be given to the members. The researcher considered the influence and member access of a select group of church leaders and helpers as it developed a training program expected to have a more substantial impact on the members than other methods of information dissemination. Any group of leaders that a church believes has the appropriate access to the members and carries the substantial influence necessary to be heard can be used. The curriculum should complement the existing talents and gifts of the group selected or assembled.

Strengthening Lay Leaders and Helpers

Confidence is essential for those serving as lay helpers at Lake Church. As strong as the lay leadership team may be, there is still a benefit to focusing them on any aspect of membership need. Lay leaders are intrinsically motivated to perform well in their roles; studies have shown that leaders do their best when they have the tools necessary to excel.¹⁴⁵ Providing education that helps every church leader stretch themselves augments their existing talents and gifts and inspires them to serve in ways they had not considered.

Leaders who have enough confidence in their lay helpers to feed into them, inspire them to strive to take ownership of their place in the church, and stimulate their sense of calling.¹⁴⁶ As

¹⁴⁵ Robin John Snelgar, Michelle Renard, and Stacy Shelton, "Preventing Compassion Fatigue Amongst Pastors: The Influence of Spiritual Intelligence and Intrinsic Motivation," *Journal of psychology and theology* 45, no. 4 (2017): 249, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009164711704500401>.

¹⁴⁶ Tiago Esteves et al., "Calling for Leadership: Leadership Relation with Worker's Sense of Calling," *Leadership & organization development journal* 39, no. 2 (2018): 250-51, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-06-2016-0158>.

a result, this researcher anticipates that those Lake Church leaders, now identified as LPCs, will feel some sense of increased efficacy. Perhaps other churches who need to strengthen their lay leadership will benefit by using the intervention model used in this program for the same purpose. Their leaders and lay helpers may seek more opportunities to improve their effectiveness and may continue to experience the rewards of helping their neighbors and church members.

Concerns

Survey Question Type

The design used for the data collection questionnaires primarily consisted of questions requiring the respondent to select from a Likert scale answer set. Many Likert scale answer sets are 5-point Likert scales, but the researcher limited the possible answer selections to four. Answers followed a pattern of “Very confident; Somewhat confident; Not very confident; Not confident at all” and other similar answer options as applicable for the question. Commonly, in a 5-point Likert scale, there is a neutral response, allowing the respondent to indicate their disinterest, inapplicability, neutrality, or apathy regarding the subject of the question. The question-set provided two affirmative and two negative response options, with no possible gray area response. Therefore, the answer sets functionally served as agree/disagree or yes/no answer banks.

In retrospect, the development of the questionnaires and their questions were faulty, except for those questions requiring one to choose from actual numerical values. Otherwise, the only information the researcher needed from respondents was an indication that they agreed or disagreed with the question asked, had confidence in the subject identified, or other such

responses. Therefore, the researcher believes yes/no response banks would have been sufficient to understand the participants' perceived value in the intervention and whether they might use the strategy taught.

Participation

Lake Church members rely heavily on the pastor and other specific ordained or trusted leaders to inspire and maintain interest in the church's programs. Although invitations to participate or observe the Living Prayer seminar were extended to all such leaders, the researcher failed to adequately inquire about their availability. As mentioned, all participants selected from the prayer team were leaders in the church, but none were at the pastoral or department head level. The pastor, associate pastor, and the heads of the youth and college and career departments were aware of the intervention but were unavailable for the training due to conflicting events. There is a risk that without these leaders on board with the initiative, some church members will not learn the Living Prayer concept, or the program may fade away over time.

The condition that led to the failure to include key church leaders was the hastiness of scheduling. This project could not begin until IRB approval, and upon its approval, the project needed to move at a pace that provided for completion in a reasonable amount of time. Therefore, the scheduling window was narrow, making it difficult to accommodate the schedules of all desired participants. Many potential attendees had family, school, athletic, or ministry events that had understandable priority over the Living Prayer seminar.

Additionally, the selection process was intentionally limited to the Lake Church prayer team, although some of the leaders who did not attend did meet the selection standards. By limiting those leaders who could attend the seminars as full participants, the researcher limited his base of potential attendees. Those who were invited but would not have been participants of

the study, but would only be observers, might not have felt that their attendance was necessary. Hence, the researcher recommends that those who may attempt similar interventions consider if their selection restrictions hinder their ability to include key church leaders.

Research Limitations

Small Sample Size

The sample size of twelve participants was representative of approximately 10% of the active membership of Lake Church. The total number of participants produces, based on the selected standard of 10%, allowing for only twelve. According to Jeffrey Martin and Drew Martin, small sample sizes are potentially problematic as they tend to produce false positives and potentially irreproducible results.¹⁴⁷ Therefore the small sample size and the use of a specific and specialized group of lay leaders may have reduced the project's perceived convertibility to other churches. The research strongly suggests that adding additional training to augment existing ministry proficiencies is perceived by all participants as beneficial. However, since the sample size is small, churches of larger sizes may not recognize the usefulness of the intervention in a larger church context.

Brief Trial Period

Although it was possible to evaluate the outcomes of the intervention's training curriculum for how it affected the project participants, there are three specific areas that the researcher will not be able to evaluate. The primary purpose of this project was to develop and execute an intervention that would affect the condition of counselees who enter formal

¹⁴⁷ Jeffrey Martin, and Drew Martin, "The N-Pact Factor, Replication, Power, and Quantitative Research in Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly," *Kinesiology review* 10, no. 3 (2021): 363, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1123/kr.2020-0067>.

counseling at the LCCC. The intervention also intended to help those struggling with life's issues become aware of the value of counseling. Finally, the intervention had the potential to help those experiencing conditions related to submitted prayer requests adjust from the negative aspects of their experiences using Living Prayer.

The researcher has concluded that an extended trial period would have allowed him to identify whether such an intervention can have a lasting impact on the three circumstances specified. By following the Living Prayer process over time, the researcher might have identified which booster interventions might be necessary to keep the church engaged in the concept.

Multiple Church Approach

The research in this paper is necessarily limited to a single church, since the objective was to affect only a particular group of Lake Church leaders. However, there might have been some value in comparing the effectiveness of the Living Prayer coaching or other similar quality improvement interventions in churches of different demographics, sizes, and regions that either have or have access to counseling programs. By involving a group of churches in the project, there might have been more participant diversity, and the additional churches would have added an additional variable for consideration.

Qualitative Data Collection Not Included

This quality improvement research project aimed to address and improve a specific problem within a particular time and place. The documented intervention statistics recorded and analyzed herein result from quantitative data collected in association with an action research project. Although action research projects can include qualitative data collection, the researcher used only quantitative data to simplify data collection and analysis. Quantitative data collection

strictly provided objective representations of the opinions of the surveyed participants and gave no attention to the participants' subjective feelings or creative imaginings.

Future research regarding the use of Living Prayer or some other approach to counseling preparation should include a qualitative component, such as interviews, so the researcher might learn additional ways of using their intervention concept through participant creativity. Discussions or interviews may have helped reveal why certain participants were either enthusiastic or pessimistic regarding the ideas presented. The researcher might have improved the value of Living Prayer coaching by accentuating areas of their research and the associated training that drive enthusiasm or by improving those areas identified as having little or no positive impact on participants.

Theological and Theoretical Implications

Theological

Communication with God will always be the first approach used at Lake Church Counseling Center to help a member begin to find freedom from any condition in which they might have become stuck. Likewise, it is the responsibility of the church's leaders and other helping mechanisms to direct people first to the Lord as they initiate informed, positive support services for struggling or stuck members.¹⁴⁸ The Literature Review section contains research identifying hope's significant role in helping struggling people identify a pathway to freedom. However, it is from the Bible that such a pathway is most clearly defined.

¹⁴⁸ Willis M. Watt, "Relational Principles for Effective Church Leadership," *Journal of leadership education* 13, no. 2 (2014), <https://dx.doi.org/10.12806/V13/I2/T1>.

Living Prayer is an approach to hope development and progress motivation that at its core is I Thessalonians 5:17, which directs everyone to pray as if in a continuous relationship with God. Most church members are likely aware of I Thessalonians 5:17. Still, they may not fully understand that their relationship with the Lord can be more than just periodic asking, receiving, and rejoicing over major life experiences, but also for those things not so extreme. For God, there is no such thing as minutiae or bad timing; God is always available to help with the daily challenges associated with life and the struggle against the world's evils.¹⁴⁹ Living Prayer, as an approach to correction and personal development, identifies I Thessalonians 5:17 as expressing more than the Lord's continuous availability to counsel. The Living Prayer approach to correction and development relies on the fact that the Lord is not only active when called upon but continuously available with the answers and ability to move one from their current place to a place of rejoicing. A full-on relationship with God is one where the individual asks, listens for an expected response, responds in faith to the answer, and lives according to what the Lord is teaching through His word and the active guidance provided through a continuous relationship with Him.

But as mentioned, not everyone in the church is on God's program, but they are in the church. Participation in a church equipped with mentors and leaders who are knowledgeable about the value of hope and a living relationship with the Lord is vital for those who will experience life's struggles. However, for the previous statement to be reflective of a church, the church must have prepared its mentors and leaders for the mission of helping the struggling participant. For Lake Church, the preparation came from LPC training, where a group of leaders

¹⁴⁹ Dirk G. Van der Merwe, "Prayer, the Encounter and Participation, the Experience: A Pauline Exhortation Towards a Spirituality of Prayer," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39, no. 1 (2018): 1, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1768>.

received training on identifying its members' potential for, or existence of, struggle. They also learned that regardless of their perceived individual abilities, the Lord is fully capable of responding to the prayers of those suffering.

Of those who participated in the LPC training, 100% developed one or more methods of sharing Living Prayer with church members and those they meet daily. As a result, Lake Church is not only equipped with a group of wise counselors, but its wise counselors can help those suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles seek the Lord for correction. Those trained as LPCs all agree that prayer is essential for overcoming life's struggles and that Living Prayer is a valuable tool for adjusting from those struggles. Additionally, all those trained as LPCs believe that they are equipped to teach Living Prayer to others at varying levels. Therefore, this researcher believes Lake Church is better prepared to help struggling members identify a pathway to freedom in the Lord.

Theoretical

Although this project was not a theoretical work, it drew on several theoretical perspectives to validate the intervention plan and prepare the participants for the ministry work associated with the intervention. The intervention included teaching Living Prayer as a device for inspiring hope by those responding to struggling church members. Living Prayer is a technique for use by all church members and practitioners who ascribe to the various hope-focused and solutions-based counseling approaches. The method's strength is its ability to inspire struggling members and counselees to utilize prayer as their primary change motivator and hope engine. Living Prayer functions on three fundamental realities to establish its approach to correction.

The Living Component

The first component relies on the purpose of living, which is to move from one place to a place of superior quality. In simple life terms, a person seventeen years of age and in high school endeavors to graduate, turn eighteen, and enter college. *Living* implies an advancement from one stage of life to the next. In the case of the student, the advancements were from seventeen to eighteen years old, and from high school to college. Both advancements were improvements or progressions from a previous condition or state of life to one superior to the last. Of course, since the focus of consideration is relative to counseling and correction, Living Prayer allows only for quality improvement.

The Prayer Component

The Bible identifies prayer as the conduit of communication with the one true God who has the knowledge man needs but has not yet learned. In Jeremiah 33:2, the Lord identifies Himself to the prophet as LORD, the Creator. There is no room for confusion regarding to whom one must pray, and he is YAHWEH, the one true God of creation. In the next verse (33:3), God tells Jeremiah to pray to Him and promises to answer with all things Jeremiah does not know. God told Jeremiah that without requesting the information from Him, he could not know how to complete his mission because God is the only one who knows how.¹⁵⁰ Without communicating with God regarding how to glorify Him and do His will in whatever comes next, man will do the world's will. Man today has God's word and the Holy Spirit to interpret it, but without prayer, man's only active influence is the world.

Romans 8:26-27 explains that man has no knowledge of what he needs to adjust from life's infirmities and does not even know what to ask of God, but God knows. Coupled with 1

¹⁵⁰ David Guzik, *Jeremiah & Lamentations: Verse by Verse Commentary*, Kindle Edition ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Enduring Word Media, 2021).

Thessalonians 5:17, prayer is to be a continuous communication with God, who has, for the petitioner, the knowledge to move him from where he is to the place known and designated only by Him. The movement from one place to that place God designates is indicative of the act of living, with prayer being the method of acquiring the guidance to get there, AKA Living Prayer.

The Hope Component

According to Romans 8:24-25, hope is a thing man cannot see, but if he is a Christian, he has experienced it. It was hope that drove him to Christ, and all hope related to life after salvation relies on man's ability to trust that God will act on his behalf. Romans 8:25 implies that Christians, knowing that God will come through for them, are patient to wait for Him. Living Prayer helps people take the necessary action to inspire hope and accomplish goals. The awareness that God has the answers, and the recollection of His faithful responses to prayer, encourages people to seek more of His involvement in their lives. Simply stated, hope seeks hope. When one seeks provision and receives it, they become inspired to seek more. Furthermore, the expectation that God will be the one to move them from their current place to a place of freedom inspires the hope to push toward correction and adjustment.

Conclusion

This project has provided the researcher a reason to be enthusiastic about the ability to train Lake Church lay helpers in next level helping approaches. All participants associated with the intervention indicated a willingness to assist those suffering from emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. Lake Church lay leaders and helpers have also demonstrated a desire to learn and implement new strategies for assisting members and those in the community to overcome the world's negative influence and grow closer to the Lord. They

have learned a method they and others can use to develop a more intimate relationship with the Lord, leading to a more focused kingdom lifestyle.

The approach added to the Lake Church helper toolbox is known to the group as Living Prayer. For the lay helper and those they tend to, Living Prayer is an organized way of doing as the Lord commanded in I Thessalonians 5:17. The Lord expects His children to stay in constant communication with Him. The concept of Living Prayer helps individuals remain focused on God in those times when such a focus is difficult. Living Prayer is valuable in all circumstances but particularly useful during times of emotional, spiritual, relational, and personal development struggles. LPCs are those trained to use the additional tool, as they identify members who are struggling, and according to survey results, they feel equipped to do so.

It is beneficial for Lake Church to have a team of lay helpers who can act as front-line support for struggling members. However, the more valuable aspect of having trained LPCs is their potential effect on the Lake Church counseling process. LPC training teaches lay helpers to prepare struggling members for possible interaction with the Lake Church Counseling Center. Since the center uses Living Prayer as its initial response to most counselee presentations, it is helpful for them to have some foreknowledge of the approach.

This researcher believes that in the future, the counseling center will admit counsees who have already begun engaging with the Lord in Living Prayer or will come prepared to start doing so. The researcher bases his confidence on the overwhelming support of study participants regarding Living Prayer's ability to help themselves and others remain focused on the kingdom of God and its thinking. Additionally, the participants believe they are prepared and willing to share the approach with others. Finally, several participants felt equipped to teach the LPC

training course to their associates. Furthermore, six participants trained someone during the trial period.

Overall, the results of this intervention were as expected. The researcher believes the predictability of the results is attributable to the careful consideration given to participant selection. The researcher recommends that those who attempt such a quality improvement project in the future evaluate their lay leadership and helpers before finalizing their intervention plan. As was found during this project, an intervention plan tailored to the collective gifts and proficiencies of the participant group will serve the organization better than attempting to change the people involved.

As it relates to needed future research on Living Prayer, there are great opportunities to move the concept from project-driven to theoretically defined. Although much is written on the benefits of prayer in human life and the value of Christian integration in counseling, one is hard-pressed to find anything written on using prayer as the primary approach to a counseling plan. Specifically, research should be conducted to evaluate how prayer used as the initial approach to hope or solutions-focused counseling programs stimulates the mechanism of hope in adjustment.

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