

ABSTRACT
AN ONLINE PEER-BASED SPIRITUAL MENTORING PROGRAM
FOR FIELD MISSIONARIES

by

Thomas David Nichols

An online peer-based spiritual mentoring program for field missionaries focused on improving the spiritual wellness of a group of twelve Protestant evangelical missionaries by means of a six-week blog. This study has been shaped by a wellness model of missionary member care in which wellness is understood to be a multidimensional integrated construct. Wellness is not merely the absence of illness or disease but involves a positive balanced life or a life of well-being in the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and occupational dimensions. Due to the integrated nature of people and of wellness, change in one dimension may bring about change in the other dimensions.

In order to assess the impact of online peer-based spiritual mentoring, I used a triangulated concurrent mixed-methods study. The Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI), a “relationally-based, psychometrically-sound measure of spiritual development from a broadly theistic perspective” (Hall and Edwards, “Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 342), provided quantitative data by means of a pretest and posttest. The SAI is comprised of forty-nine self-report items in which responses are tallied using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “not at all true” to “very true.” The SAI provided quantitative data in two dimensions (awareness of God and quality of relationship with God) on five scales. Realistic acceptance, instability, grandiosity, and disappointment scales provided

measurements of quality. Validity of the SAI has been demonstrated through correlations with other empirical studies.

Observation and analysis of data from within the blog, together with a weekly journal reflection, provided qualitative data. I identified themes from the qualitative data in order to reveal how online mentoring influenced the spiritual wellness of the participants. Following data collection and analysis, I compared and interpreted the results of the quantitative and qualitative data regarding the impact of the spiritual mentoring program on the spiritual wellness of the missionary participants.

Although the quantitative data did not show statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest means of the SAI, the qualitative data revealed that the Kaibigan blog had a positive impact on the spiritual well-being of the missionaries.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

When I recently asked a missionary what was her greatest spiritual struggle, she replied “[H]ow to have a spiritual life that is refreshing, rewarding, honoring to God.... [I] do struggle to make space and time for God to speak to me.” In our role as field missionary member care providers, my wife and I nurture and care for the personal well-being of our missionary personnel. We are seeking to develop a missionary member care model that assists missionaries to develop a healthy life in all dimensions of their lives. Our member care team vision is “to see our mission members embrace healthy lifestyles, joyful service, and steady growth in Christ-likeness; enabling members to begin, continue, and finish well in their ministries” (Nichols and Nichols). Furthermore, our mission is as follows:

In dependence on God individually and corporately, we foster a climate where field members and teams are aware of their multi-dimensional (spiritual, social, physical, intellectual, occupational, and emotional) care needs; encouraging, and equipping them to develop and maintain overall wellness, through building personal relationships and sharing resources (time, energy, funds, hospitality, expertise, and other available tools). (Nichols and Nichols)

We believe that missionary effectiveness requires health and well-being in all dimensions of a missionary’s life (Tidwell 120).

My ministry intervention focused on providing care in the spiritual dimension of missionary members. Each missionary is created in the image of God, an image that is multidimensional, with each dimension being fully integrated with that of the other. Thus, when one dimension grows, the other dimensions will likely be affected in a

positive way. In Chapter 2, I explore the image of God as it relates to wellness. I also explore the holistic view of personhood in the health, social, and psychological fields. A number of studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between spiritual wellness and emotional, psychological, social, and physical wellness. Because of the integrated nature of a person, spiritually well missionaries will likely have a better chance to function well in their other dimensions.

Spiritual member care is one of the most difficult (and one of the most important) areas in which to provide care for missionaries. Because an individual's spiritual life is a very private and personal matter, spiritual member care is not easily discussed, even among missionaries. Few would describe a healthy spiritual life in the same way, especially in a multicultural, multinational, multilingual mission organization. Even if agreement can be made about what is necessary for spiritual wellness, measuring progress in spiritual matters continues to be a challenge.

Many missionaries have wrong perceptions about member care. Kelly O'Donnell defines member care as the "ongoing investment of resources by mission agencies, churches, and other mission organizations for the nurture and development of missionary personnel" ("Pearls and Perils" 3). Missionaries may understand member care as something only needed by individuals with problems. Missionaries are known to be a group of people who are reluctant to ask for help, especially from mental health professionals (Sparks 5, 16; Keckler 36). When missionaries have sought the help of a member care worker, they have often been viewed as "unspiritual or weak, and not trusting the Lord enough" (O'Donnell, "Staying Healthy in Difficult Places" 5). In a wellness model of member care, missionary concerns about asking for help are alleviated

because care is provided for all and not just for those who are *sick*. For this reason, Brent Lindquist suggests *member health* is a better term than member care because it “starts from prevention rather than remediation” (20). In this dissertation, however, I continue to use the term member care for the care and nurture of missionaries.

Missionaries are often presumed to possess a high level of spirituality. When people in supporting churches reckon missionaries *have arrived* spiritually, both missionaries and supporting churches may find it difficult to have open discussions about missionary spirituality (Duhe 7). Someone once suggested to my wife that it “must be nice to live on a different level than everyone else!” Missionaries experience a heavy burden when they believe they must live up to a *missionary image* in which “missionaries are the choicest people called by God and have exceptional gifts that enable them to endure great trials and accomplish great things for God” (Tidwell 6-7). Missionaries may believe themselves to be “the representative of God,” which puts additional stress on the spirituality of any missionary (Hall and Sweatman 246; Rosik, Richards, and Fannon 36).

Missionary organizations believe that spiritual maturity is a key criterion for any missionary candidate. However, missionary organizations may be assuming that missionaries remain spiritually healthy once they get to the field. A problem noted is that missionaries who are more focused on *doing* than *becoming* can “easily lose sight of the Spirit’s direction” (Tidwell 79-80). Although Dorothy Gish (239) and O’Donnell (“From Rhetoric” 203) do not find spirituality to be one of the top missionary stressors, Phil Parshall, in an often-cited article, says that missionaries admit that maintaining a healthy spiritual life is one of the biggest challenges they face (11).

Focusing on the spiritual dimension of missionary member care should contribute

to greater productivity on the part of missionaries. A missionary's spiritual health often affects their cross-cultural adjustment and the performance of their ministry (Barnett et al. 29). Missionary satisfaction with their spiritual life has an impact on missionary retention, ministry satisfaction, and effectiveness (Andrews 107; Barnett 129).

My ministry intervention used an online peer-based spiritual mentoring program for field-based missionaries in order to enhance the spiritual wellness of missionaries. Internet-based tools have already been used to provide spiritual care and missionary member care. Alan D. Lyke, in 2005, was able to use online interactive groups focused on spirituality to enhance the spiritual well-being of externally based college students. Numerous dedicated Web sites provide resources for the member care needs of missionaries scattered around the world (Tidwell; Schwandt; Sparks). Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature involving computer-mediated communication (CMC) being used to furnish spiritual and missionary member care.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of a six-week online peer-based spiritual mentoring program on the spiritual wellness of a group of twelve field-based missionaries.

Research Questions

The following research questions served to guide the purpose of this study.

Research Question #1

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness before they joined an online spiritual mentoring group?

Research Question #2

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness following the conclusion of the online spiritual mentoring group?

Research Question #3

How does participation in an online peer-based spiritual mentoring group impact the spiritual wellness of missionaries?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are significant to this ministry project.

Field-Based Missionaries

Field-based Protestant evangelical missionaries actually live in another country of service as opposed to home-based missionaries, who live in their home country and may or may not travel into cross-cultural situations.

Online Community

Online refers to the Web-based environment in which an activity takes place. In online communities, all the activities and interactions occur on the Internet. In this project, the online community was created in an invitation-only blog. Online communities are groups of people meeting together and interacting with one another on the Internet because “they share similar goals, plans, values and beliefs” (Bishop 1889).

Peer-Based Spiritual Mentoring

Because mentoring “is a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources” (Clinton 2-3), spiritual mentoring focuses on the sharing of spiritual resources to empower and encourage others to grow spiritually. Spiritual mentoring is described as peer based because all the participants are field-based

missionaries, and they will be involved in what is known as co-mentoring. In co-mentoring, two or more peers desire to help one another develop in an area of mutual interest.

Spiritual Wellness

Six aspects of dimensions compose wellness: spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and occupational (Keckler, Moriarty, and Blagen 208). Wellness has been defined as “the proper functioning of persons as integrated systems” (Ellison and Smith 36). Wellness is *not* merely the absence of illness or disease but involves a positively balanced life or a life of well-being in all of these dimensions. People have degrees of wellness, as on a continuum, rather than wellness being declared to be absent or present. A spiritually well person will have a positive awareness of and relationship experience with God in daily life:

[Spiritual wellness] is the degree to which a person’s relationship with God reflects the ability to maintain a consistent sense of emotional connection with God in the midst of spiritual struggles, and the degree to which a person is aware of God’s working in his or her life. (Hall, Edwards, and Hall 195)

Spiritually healthy people are aware of God’s presence with them even when going through hardship or suffering.

Ministry Intervention

Fifteen field-based missionaries committed to participate in a six-week online peer-based spiritual mentoring group. In addition to a self-measured pretest and posttest evaluation of spiritual wellness, participants agreed to fill out a demographic survey, participate in a blog, and submit a weekly journal reflection on their spiritual wellness.

The project took place within the confines of a password-protected blog at WordPress.com that I designed for this project.

Blogs (short for Weblogs) are online journals that are part of computer-mediated communication. CMC is “any communication transaction that takes place by way of a computer, whether online or offline, but especially the former” (McQuail 551). For purposes of this ministry intervention, I created a *closed-group blog*, a blog that was only accessible to group members with a password. The closed blog resided at a permanent URL on the Web.

Blogs are composed of posts and comments. A blog post is a new statement or question initiated by the facilitator or any other member of the group blog, which all members of the blog can see when online. When participants sign up for a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed, they are notified that a new post has been made. Participants are encouraged to make *comments*. A *comment* is a response or a reply by anyone in the group blog (including the original poster) to a blog post. Comments to posts may be seen by all members of the group. As with the original posts, an RSS feed ensures that group members are notified that a comment has been made.

I acted as the facilitator or moderator of the group by introducing and posting a passage for the group’s daily Bible reading. Group members were encouraged to formationally read and meditate on the daily Scripture passage (see Appendix D). After conducting a pilot study, I removed a minimum requirement on the number of comments each participant needed to make in a week. Each participant responded to a weekly journal prompt sent by the group moderator. In the journal question, members reflected

on their awareness of God and on the quality of their relationship with God in the previous week.

Before I accepted anyone as a member for the project, a person had to indicate agreement with the Kaibigan Blog Essentials (KBE). The KBE was a document that functioned as a group covenant, contained guidelines for conduct on the blog and provided an explanation about netiquette or courtesies that should be extended to other online members while on the blog. With this knowledge, group members would know how to avoid offending others by either the content or style of their blog posts and comments. As the blog moderator, I monitored blog comments and posts in order to edit or remove flaming (negative, emotional comments against another member), offensive, or off-topic posts that could have negatively affected the formation of an online community (Phang, Kankanhalli, and Sabherwal 723, 730-32, 740).

Context

This ministry intervention targeted Protestant evangelical missionaries from a selected mission that primarily serves in East Asia.

All Missionaries Worldwide

According to Todd M. Johnson, David B. Barrett, and Peter F. Crossing, in 2006, approximately 463,000 foreign missionaries served in nations other than their own, whereas in 2010, they reduced the figure to 400,000 missionaries (30). At any one time, an unknown percentage of these foreign missionaries returns to their home country for a home assignment before returning to their field of service. Even though many more missionaries serve cross-culturally within their own nations, this ministry intervention was focused on field-based international or foreign missionaries.

All Missionaries in the Philippines of a Selected Evangelical Mission

Over 110 missionaries served in the Philippines in 2009 with the selected evangelical missionary organization. The missionaries represented over ten different nationalities and even more language groups. The ages of the missionaries ranged from 31 to 72 with a mean age of 43.2; 42 percent were male and 58 percent were female; 16 percent were single and 84 percent were married.

Within the country where my wife and I serve, member care is the primary responsibility of the mission team leader, but not all individuals fall into mission-led teams. Almost half of our field members serve in other Christian organizations, and in each of these situations, a defined memorandum of agreement between our mission and the second organization specifies that our mission will provide member care for the missionary (see Appendix B). My wife and I are the designated member care providers for the majority of these seconded members. We also are responsible to oversee the member care for our entire field, including members within mission-led teams and possessing a team leader.

Methodology

Fifteen missionary participants joined a six-week online peer-based spiritual mentoring group. The project evaluated the impact of a spiritual mentoring group on the spiritual wellness dimension of the missionary sample studied through a triangulation mixed-methods impact design.

Participants

Out of a population of 110 missionaries of an evangelical Protestant mission in the Philippines, fifteen self-selected missionaries agreed to participate in this project. An

e-mail explaining the project was sent to every missionary on this field. Volunteers interested in the project were contacted with more information. Each volunteer participant agreed to participate according to the guidelines of the project. In order to obtain enough volunteers for the spiritual mentoring group, I was also prepared to contact missionaries in other countries in which the mission served.

Instrumentation

As part of a triangulation mixed-methods impact design, the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) evaluated the spiritual wellness of participants using a pretest and posttest. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, which included information about their familiarity and comfort with the use of Internet technology.

Variables

Directed Bible readings, taking place in an online group over a period of six weeks provided the variables in this intervention. Changes in missionary spiritual wellness supplied the outcome or dependent variable studied.

I identified a number of intervening variables that had the potential to hinder the project. In order to limit people dropping out of the group because of busyness or family/personal concerns, the study was limited to six weeks. Technology issues were a possible limiting factor. Each member of the group received assistance (as needed) in accessing the blog via computer. Members were encouraged to blog on a practice blog that I set up the week before the project began. Consistent Internet access, Internet speed, electricity supply, and the malfunction of personal computers were outside of the control of this intervention. Any one of these factors could have negatively influenced the participation of a group member.

Data Collection

Before the project began, I e-mailed each participant a link to the Spiritual Assessment Instrument at SurveyMonkey and asked them to complete the instrument within the week. I then filed and recorded the data for later analysis.

In order to create the spiritual mentoring blog at WordPress.com, I purchased the domain name kaibiganblog.org for one year. Kaibigan is the Tagalog word for friend. All daily blog activities were saved automatically on the Web site. Each week, I consolidated the comments and posts into a document file for later analysis. At the end of each week, a journal prompt consisting of one question was e-mailed to the participants, requesting an immediate reply. I maintained separate files for replies to the weekly journal prompt.

Following week six of the spiritual mentoring group, I e-mailed the participants a link to the Spiritual Assessment Inventory at SurveyMonkey and asked them to complete the assessments within the week. As in the pretest, I recorded and filed the data for analysis.

Data Analysis

After recording and summarizing the data from both the pretest and posttest from the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, I computed the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for both tests. I analyzed the qualitative data collected from the blog, along with the individual journal entries e-mailed to me in order to draw out themes and formulate conclusions about the impact of participation in the online peer-based spiritual mentoring group on the spiritual wellness of the group members.

Generalizability

Although pre-field and externally based field member care exists, this intervention focused exclusively on spiritual mentoring within one evangelical mission organization in Asia. Conclusions discovered in this study may be applicable to missionaries serving in similar circumstances.

Theological Foundation

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, may best describe the intention of God for his creation. *Shalom* describes a proper relationship to God or “the way things ought to be” (Plantinga 10). *Shalom* has a rich meaning of completeness, wholeness, harmony, and fulfillment (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, “Shalom”). “*Shalom* involves a “prospering in all relationships—with God, self, neighbor, community, even livestock and the land and peoples around them” (Spruyt, Lloyd, and Schudel 502). *Shalom* provides a vision for a wellness approach to missionary member care.

The New Testament word for peace, *eirene*, is often used to translate *shalom* in the Greek Old Testament and can refer in the New Testament to the “salvation of the whole person” (Foerster). Another Greek word, *teleios*, translated as perfect, complete, and maturity may also refer to the wholeness of a person (Col. 1:28; 4:12), a wholeness that fully “awaits us in the future” (Schippers).

God created human beings in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). The image of God refers to the entire person and not just to a person’s spiritual dimension. Wayne Grudem describes the image of God in people as possessing intellectual, moral, spiritual, ruling, creative, relational, and physical dimensions. God intended man and woman to be

integrated “psycho-spiritual-somatic beings” (Benner, “Nurturing Spiritual Growth” 359).

God called his human creation very good and blesses them (Gen 1:31). Blessed people, in right relationship with God, would experience spiritual well-being, a “secure, stable, and satisfied existence” (Brown; Hag. 2:19; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 5:3-11). The themes of blessing and *shalom* are tied together in the great blessing passage of Numbers 6:24-26.

God shows his concern for the whole person in the New Testament. Spiritual salvation and physical healing are often combined. Jesus heals the paralytic in Mark 3 but first forgives his sins. On other occasions, Jesus conjoins spiritual and physical healing (e.g., Bartimaeus in Luke 18:35-43; two blind men in Matt. 20:34). At the end of the age, God will bring healing and wellness to all who worship before him (Rev. 21:4). Even though the fullest sense of well-being and *shalom* will not be seen until Christ returns, believers should care for one another, remembering the vision of what will one day come to be.

Jesus said that the mark of his disciples was the love they have for one another: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, ESV). The essence of missionary member care is seeking to love missionaries the church has sent out. Paul describes the church as many members but one body (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Because of the unity of the body, members are to care for one another. As members of the body of Christ, missionaries need care.

The Church of Antioch (Acts 14:26-28) provides one of the earliest examples of a local church caring for missionaries that had been sent to the mission field. Upon the

return of their missionaries, the church gathered together to celebrate “all that God had done” (Acts 14:27). Paul would later be a recipient of member care from the church of Corinth when Stephanus visited Paul (1 Cor. 16:15-18). In a similar way, the church of Philippi sent Epaphroditus to be a messenger, a gift giver, and to minister to Paul’s needs (Phil. 3:25; 4:18).

Missionary member care emphasizes that missionaries cannot live in a healthy way when they live in isolation. Christian community is essential for a believer to grow spiritually and to maintain spiritual well-being. Each person is organically connected to the other when the Spirit makes them part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Mentoring is one way in which Christians encourage others to grow.

Biblical leaders practiced mentoring throughout the Bible. Both the Old Testament (e.g., Moses and Aaron; Elijah and Elisha) and the New Testament (e.g., Jesus and his disciples; Paul and Timothy) contain examples of spiritual mentoring relationships. Spiritual mentors help their mentorees become mature in Christ (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Mentors can encourage others to follow them because they are following Christ (1 Cor. 4:16).

Overview

In Chapter 2, I begin with a reflection on the biblical and theological foundations for missionary member care and spiritual care within the body of Christ. Second, I examine the literature concerning the multidimensional nature of wellness and the relationship between overall wellness and spiritual wellness. Third, after discussing the nature of wellness, spiritual wellness, and spirituality, I concentrate on missionary spirituality to see if a focus on spiritual care for missionaries is needed. Fourth, I provide

an overview of how CMC is being used to provide missionary member care and spiritual care to others. Finally, I review the literature on virtual communities in order to learn about the nature, possibilities, and challenges of creating a virtual community using current technology.

Chapter 3 includes a discussion and explanation for the methodological design of the study, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, variables, and data analysis. Chapter 4 provides results for the study. Chapter 5 completes the study with a summary of the conclusions derived from the data, as well as practical applications of the conclusions and further study possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Problem

Missionary member care focuses on the nurture and care for the personal well-being of missionary personnel in all dimensions. Wellness is composed of spiritual, social, physical, intellectual, emotional, and occupational dimensions. The spiritual dimension of missionary member care is one of the most difficult (and most important) areas of missionary member care. In this chapter, I demonstrate the need for a special focus on missionary member care in the spiritual dimension.

First, I start with a biblical-theological reflection on the themes of wellness, missionary member care, and spiritual mentoring. The vision of *shalom*, blessing, and the future redemption of God's fallen creation support an emphasis on promoting missionary member health. I show how missionary member care is part of the larger care that God desires for all members of the body of Christ. Examples of New Testament missionary member care are explored, which should establish a basis for present-day practices. I also demonstrate how spiritual mentoring, key to the ministry intervention of this dissertation, is grounded in the biblical record.

Second, I explain how today's understanding of wellness and health includes a multidimensional and integrated nature. I explore support for the idea that growth in any one of the dimensions of a person has the capacity to improve the wellness in the other dimensions. Specifically, I attempt to demonstrate that other studies have revealed a correlation between spiritual wellness and the overall wellness of a person.

Third, I establish a definition of spiritual well-being from the literature. Spiritual well-being requires a discussion of spirituality and an examination of the relationship between spirituality and spiritual well-being. I also discuss some of the challenges involved in attempting to measure spiritual well being.

Fourth, I explore what is known about the spirituality of missionaries. I survey the literature on missionary member care and focus on what has been learned about the relationship between the spiritual well-being of missionaries and their attrition and retention. I want to see if the stresses of missionary life adversely affect the spiritual life of missionaries sufficiently to justify special attention in this area. I also examine what assistance missionaries need in order to maintain, develop, and grow in their spiritual lives. In order to assess missionary spiritual needs, I investigate comments and surveys made by missionaries, their leaders and organizations, and experts in the missionary member care field.

Fifth, I draw upon the literature regarding computer-mediated communication. I investigate what has been learned from those who have used CMC to provide member care to missionaries. I will also be surveying how CMC has been used to provide spiritual care for people. Finally, I explore the best practices of CMC that are necessary to build successful online communities.

Biblical-Theological Reflections

The Bible addresses wellness, missionary member care, and spiritual mentoring. The Scriptures provide insights into the nature and source of care missionaries should receive.

Shalom and Wellness

In this section, I explore what the Scriptures teach about God's desire for his creation to experience *shalom*.

Created in the image of God. Although the Bible does not give a detailed explanation of the meaning of human creation in the image and likeness of God, understanding what these terms imply is possible. In the word *likeness* (Hebrew *damah*) God's human creation is seen to represent him. Psalm 8 shows that human beings represent the presence of God in the world (Konkel; Grudem). Included in the image of God are intellectual, moral, spiritual, ruling, creative, relational, and physical dimensions (Grudem). When *tselem*, the Hebrew word for image, is understood to refer to the entire person and not just to the spiritual parts, humanity can be seen as an integrated whole (Van Leeuwen). People, created in the image and likeness of God, have an intrinsic worth (Gen 9:6; Ps. 8; Van Leeuwen).

God's creation of humanity in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27) has a number of implications for an understanding of wellness. Todd W. Hall writes, "From a theological perspective, God is not only relevant to our well-being, He defines it, because He created us and defines the *telos* of human nature. Our well-being has everything to do with God's design for us" ("Christian Spirituality" 75). The God who created human beings to be integrated "psycho-spiritual-somatic beings" (Benner, "Nurturing Spiritual Growth" 359) is concerned with the whole being. Our whole person experiences relationship with God (Cox 283-84). People do not just relate to God in the spiritual dimension of life.

God's presence affects his people, both emotionally and physically (Jer. 23:9; Ezek. 3:14,15; Ps. 1-150), not just spiritually. The joy of the Lord is a response of the whole person to the presence of God and can be expressed in a variety of physiological ways (e.g., laughter with joy, dancing with joy, singing and shouting for joy; Cox 287). Jesus commanded his followers to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, NIV). The whole person is involved in loving and relating to God.

Following the creation of Adam and Eve in his own image, Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them." Three verses later, in verse 31, God declares that his creation of man and woman in his image was "very good." God had pleasure with and longed to bless his human creation. In the great blessing passage of Numbers 6:24-26 blessing is tied in with *shalom*. The one whom God has blessed (6:24) will experience God's *shalom* (6:26). God blesses people in right relationship with himself with an experience of well-being (Hag. 2:19; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 5:3-11).

Relationship with God is experienced in many different dimensions of life (e.g., spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical) because God created people as an integrated whole. Soul, spirit, and body are not easily distinguished in the biblical record.

In the Old Testament, *nephesh* usually refers to the inner person or soul, but it may also denote the living being itself (Lev. 4:2; Josh. 11:14). Bruce Waltke suggests that "in its most synthetic use *nephesh* stands for the entire person" (Gen 2:7). *Ruach*, often translated as spirit or breath in the Old Testament, refers to the immaterial dimension of a person (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, "Ruach"; Isa. 26:9; Prov. 16:32; Ps. 32:2). Flesh and spirit together, form a person, "so that while man may be said to have a

ruach he is a *nephesh*” (Waltke). The “soul cannot exist independently of the body” (Eccl. 12:7) because when the *ruach* departs, “the person ceases to exist” (Eccl. 12:7).

In the New Testament, *psyche* refers to the soul or life, primarily referring to the physical part of the person. “*Psyche* embraces ... the whole natural being and life of man for which he concerns himself and of which he takes constant care” (Harder; Matt. 6:25). The Bible mentions the salvation of the soul as “always understood in connection with the resurrection of the body” (Harder). *Soma*, most often translated as body, “is not merely an outer form but the whole person” (1 Cor. 9:27; 13:3; Rom. 12:1; Wibbing). Paul reveals his belief in an integrated person as he prays that the spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Meaning of *shalom*. *Shalom* is the Hebrew word that may best describe the intention of God for his creation. Often translated as peace, *shalom* provides insight into a biblical understanding of the concept of wellness. *Shalom* means much more than peace; it has a rich meaning of “completeness, wholeness, harmony and fulfillment” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, “Shalom”). Each person created in the image of God was designed to have integrity and wholeness (Plantinga 10).

In the New International Version, *shalom* is translated at least seventeen times by wellness or its equivalents (Gen. 37:14; 29:6; 43:28; 1 Sam. 25:5; Esth. 10:3; Ps. 38:3; Jer. 14:19; Zech. 8:12) and refers to safety in at least eight passages (Gen. 28:21; 1 Sam. 18:29; 19:30; 1 Kings 22:27; 2 Kings 9:11; 18:26; Ps. 122:7; Jer. 12:5):

Throughout the Heb. OT, *salôm* covers well-being in the widest sense of the word (Jdg. 19:20); prosperity (Ps. 73:3), even in reference to the godless; bodily health (Isa. 57:18; Ps. 38:3); contentedness, on departure (Gen. 26:29), on going to sleep (Ps. 4:8), and at death (Gen. 15:15 etc.); good relations between nations and men (1 Ki. 5:12; Jdg. 4:17; 1 Chr. 12:17, 18); salvation (Isa. 43:7; Jer. 29:11; cf. Jer. 14:13). (Beck and Brown)

Shalom was intended for all of creation, encompassing relationships among people at every level and between people and God. God created “patterns of distinction and union and distinction-within-union that would give creation strength and beauty” (Plantinga 29). God designed human creation to be “spiritually sound,” that is, to function properly in relationship with God, others, nature, and self (34).

When missionary member care desires *shalom* for missionaries, it is seeking wellness and completeness for body, soul, and spirit.

Loss of *shalom*. Sin violates God’s intended *shalom*. Cornelius Plantinga describes several ways that sin damages God’s *shalom*. Evil spoils *shalom* whether in the physical, moral, or spiritual dimension (16). Sin corrupts or disturbs *shalom* by “twisting, weakening, and snapping the thousands of bonds that give particular beings integrity and that tie them to others” (32). Sin contaminates, bringing about a moral and spiritual pollution that defiles the wholeness, oneness, and purity intended by the holiness of God’s people (44). Sin brings about the disintegration of a pure heart into a divided one (Ps. 22:4; Matt. 5:8; Jas. 4:8).

Because of the Fall and the introduction of sin, God’s ideal of *shalom* has been disrupted, and the image of God in humanity has been marred:

After the fall, then, we are still in God’s image—we are still like God and we still represent God—but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin. (Grudem)

The disintegration begun at the Fall can be turned around “by the grace of God working through spiritual disciplines and the support of others” (Plantinga 46). Individual responsibility within the context of community is needed.

Restoration of *shalom*. Spiritual formation is the process of being restored into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Paul tells Christians to put on their new selves, “which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:10). This transformation into the image of Christ will not be complete until the coming of Christ, at which time God’s *shalom* will also be restored (1 John 3:2; Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:4). Isaiah presents beautiful images of the restored *shalom* and blessing for God’s people and for all creation at a future time (25:6-9; 35:1-10; 49:8-1; 45:1-10; 60:1-22; 62:1-12; 65:1-25).

Following faith in the person of Christ, God declares a person righteous (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1). God’s righteous ones will gain the benefit of *shalom*. Blessing and restored *shalom* are rewards for the righteous in the Old Testament (Prov. 13:21; Ps. 72:7; Deut. 16:20; 2 Sam. 23:3-5; Ps. 5:12; 37:39; 92:12; Prov. 4:18; 10:6, 28; 11:23-25, 30; 13:21; 18:10; Isa. 3:10 36:2-3). Isaiah 26:3 promises “perfect peace” for those who trust in God. In the future, peace will be the governor and righteousness the ruler (Isa. 60:17). Another Hebrew word, *shaqat*, describes the rest and calmness that God offers the anxious and fearful (Ps. 94:13; Isa. 7:4, 30:15). *Shalom* and *shaqat* together describe “meaningful existence in accordance with God’s objectives for the ideal religious and community life” (Nel). God offers rest and peace to his followers.

In the New Testament, those declared righteous have peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 15:13; Eph. 2:14, 17), experience healing (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48), and enjoy peace

bestowed by the Savior (Luke 24:36; John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26; Phil. 4:7; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20-21).

Since missionaries live in a fallen world, they fail to experience God's intended *shalom*. Member care is a co-journey with the missionary before God, seeking to see a restoration of *shalom* in all of life.

Peace. In a similar fashion, the New Testament word for peace, *eirene*, can refer to the "salvation of the whole person" (Foerster; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20-21; Luke 1:79, 2:14; Matt. 10:34; John 14:27; Rom. 16:20). *Eirene* is often used to translate *shalom* in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) where it "acquires the sense of general well-being, the source and giver of which is Yahweh alone" (Beck and Brown). Those who possess peace or well-being share in the peace and well-being that God possesses.

Another Greek word, *teleios* (perfect or mature), may also refer to the wholeness of a person (Col. 1:28; 4:12). When *teleios* is used for *shalom* in the LXX, it carries the meaning of "being whole, perfect, intact" (Schipper; 1 Kings 8:61; 11:4; Gen. 6:9). God uses trials to perfect believers (Jas. 1:4), a perfection that "signifies the undivided wholeness of a person in his behaviour" (Schipper). Trials are an essential part of the perfecting process of a Christian.

Healing and Wellness

The New Testament expands God's concern for the whole person. Spiritual salvation and physical healing are often intertwined. "Anyone healed through meeting Jesus is a person healed in his entire being by the word of the messiah" (Muller). In Mark 3:1-5, when Jesus healed the paralytic, he first forgave him of his sins and then healed him. On another occasion, when Bartimaeus told Jesus that he wanted to see (Mark

10:51), Jesus responded and said in Mark 10:52, “Your faith has made you well” (ESV).

One can see the conjunction of the spiritual (faith) with the physical when Bartimaeus recovered his sight (see also Luke 18:35-43). In a similar fashion, the two blind men beside the road in Matthew 20:34 followed Jesus (a sign of faith) after Jesus touched their eyes and they received their sight.

John mentions wellness directly in 3 John 1:2: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” Warren Wiersbe translates this verse: “I want you to be healthy in body as you are in soul” (117). John is concerned that Gaius will experience both spiritual and physical progress. Writing about 3 John 1:2, Stephen S. Smalley writes, “The spiritual and physical welfare of humanity is a properly Christian concern, as it was an important principle for Jesus himself” (346). Third John provides a biblical warrant for desiring physical and spiritual welfare for Christian friends (Stott 223; Lightner 116; Wiersbe 118).

The *eschaton* will be a time in which healing and wellness will be fully experienced by all who worship before the throne of God (Rev. 21:4). In the meantime, God, in the process of salvation, is restoring our fallen image, “unifying the interconnected elements of human nature” (Cox 285, 288).

Missionary member care should be concerned with the spiritual and physical wellness needs of missionaries. Jesus and the New Testament place a high value on the spiritual and physical needs of people and so should missionary member care providers.

Missionary Member Care

O'Donnell, drawing upon Psalm 78:72, Proverbs 27:23-24, Hebrews 3:13, and many “one-another” verses, understands that the practice of member care is “thoroughly Biblical” (“Staying Healthy in Difficult Places” 7). Glenn C. Taylor provides a theological perspective on member care: “A theology of care reflects the relationship between the members of the Trinity, the care of God for us, and the expectation that we will care for one another” (56). Missionary member care fulfills the commandment in Galatians 6:2 to “bear one another’s burdens” (Duhe 18). Because members of the body of Christ are interconnected, they are to be in reciprocal relationships: loving one another (John 13:34), encouraging one another (Rom. 1:12), living in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16), serving one another (Gal. 5:13), being kind and forgiving one another (Eph. 4:32), and submitting to one another (Eph. 5:21).

Acts 14:26-28 provides us with one of the first examples of a local church caring for missionaries they had sent to the mission field. After Paul and Barnabus had finished their first missionary journey, they returned to Antioch “where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled” (Acts 14:26). Upon their return from their first missionary journey, after the church had been gathered together, Paul and Barnabus shared what God had done in and through them. “They declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). Before returning to the mission field, Acts 14:28 says that Paul and Barnabus spent a long time (literally, “not a short time”) with the disciples at the local Antioch church. As the local church listened to the stories about what God had

done, the missionaries were affirmed in their calling and the bond between the local church and the missionaries was strengthened.

Later in his missionary career, while living in Ephesus, Paul would be the recipient of member care from Corinth, via the household of Stephanus (1 Cor. 16:15-18). Although Paul does not use member care to describe what Stephanus does, Jeffrey S. Ellis suggests that the term used to provide care for missionaries is unimportant:

Call it member care, pastoral care, coaching, mental health and missions, personnel management, or simply missionary development, but regardless of its name, the apostle Paul found himself on the receiving end of an innovative ministry, initiated by believers young in their faith but mature in their vision. (172)

Somehow, Stephanus discovered that the Apostle Paul had a need and had taken the initiative to serve Paul by traveling to Ephesus together with Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17). The commitment that they brought to Paul was one of service (see *diakonos* in 1 Cor. 16:15). After Stephanus and his companions had been with Paul, the apostle would write, “[T]hey refreshed my spirit” (1 Cor. 16:18). In fact, Paul would write to the Corinthians that Stephanus and company made up for the absence of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:17). Paul was not just appreciative of the visit; the visit “was also timely for his own emotional and personal well-being” (Ellis 173). Stephanus is an example of missionary member care taking place through a team of individuals visiting with the missionary on the field. When Paul writes, “[P]ut yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them,” in 1 Corinthians 16:16, he provides an “affirmation for those who feel a vocational calling to serve the saints” (175). Paul affirms the ministry of missionary member care provided by Stephanus.

Paul was also well cared for by the Philippian church. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus as a messenger, as a gift giver, and as one to minister to Paul's needs (Phil. 3:25; 4:18). The Philippian church demonstrated a consistent and dependable support for Paul in his missionary work by sending him help over and over when he was in need (Phil 4:16).

In 3 John 5-8, John commends Gaius for caring for missionaries, those who had “gone out for the sake of the Name,” even though he had no personal relationship with them (“even though they are strangers to you,” NIV). John affirmed Gaius in his actions in verse 6: “You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.” John wanted Gaius and others who would read this letter to know that they should support missionaries, “we ought to support people like these” (ESV). As a result of their assistance to missionaries, these missionary supporters would become partners in the ministry (“fellow workers for the truth” [3 John 8]).

Missionaries need love and care as do all members of the body of Christ. Special care for missionaries is grounded in the examples of the New Testament.

Spiritual Mentoring

Few doubt that spiritual growth best takes place in community. David G. Benner writes, “No Christian tradition relies wholly on the individual soul connecting with God in a manner unsupported by others.... No one comes to God alone” (“Nurturing Spiritual Growth” 356). Both in the Old Testament (the nation of Israel) and in the New Testament (the church), the people of God joined together in spiritual communities to follow the ways of their God and to become like him in their character. God does not intend Christians to live isolated lives: “Christians do not grow in a balanced and most effective

way when they remain isolated from meaningful relationships with other believers” (Holloman 14). Mentoring relationships are one way in which Christian growth can be encouraged in the context of community.

Mentoring defined. Mentoring may be defined as “a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources” (Clinton 2-3). Resources shared may be wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, or status (Clinton and Stanley 40). Mentoring relationships are intended to facilitate “development or empowerment” (40). A mentor is a person “who is committed to helping you grow, keeping you growing, and helping you realize your life goals” (Hendricks and Hendricks 158). Mentors provide support specific to the need of the mentoree.

In Clinton’s constellation model, people have upward mentors, downward mentors, or share in peer co-mentor relationships. Writing about the principle of teamwork in adult learning, Jane Vella highlights the value of peers:

In a team, learning is enhanced by peers. We know that peers hold significant authority with adults, more authority than most teachers. Peers often have similar experience. They can challenge one another in ways a teacher cannot. Peers create safety for the learner who is struggling with complex concepts and skills or attitudes. I have seen significant mentoring go on in teams: peers helping one another, often with surprising clarity, tenderness, and skill. (23)

Peer co-mentor relationships are most suitable for the spiritual mentoring of missionaries because of the understanding, shared experiences, and trust that have already been earned.

Spiritual mentoring focuses on the sharing of spiritual resources to empower and encourage others to grow spiritually. A mentor as a spiritual guide is a “godly, mature

follower of Christ who shares knowledge, skills, and basic philosophy on what it means to increasingly realize Christlikeness in all areas of life” (Clinton and Stanley 65).

Spiritual mentors might also be called spiritual friends, “friends that support your transformational journey in Christian spirituality” (Benner, *Sacred Companions* 16).

Spiritual mentoring seems to be the best term to describe the relationship between fellow travelers on a journey with Christ who desire to support one another.

Biblical basis for spiritual mentoring. The practice of spiritual mentoring (although not the term) has a long history in the biblical record. Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and his disciples, Paul and Timothy, Barnabas and John Mark, and Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos are but a few examples of spiritual mentoring relationships found in the Bible. Dodie Lynn Huff-Fletcher suggests that the Old Testament model of spiritual mentoring was one in which the spiritual mentoree looked to the Scriptures for direct guidance, with the priest, wise person, and prophet offering knowledge, experience, and maturity whereas the New Testament model is Jesus as spiritual mentor helping “others deepen their relationship with God” (47). Spiritual mentoring is a suitable modern-day term to describe the historical practices of the people of God involved in encouraging others to grow spiritually.

The New Testament contains other examples of spiritual mentoring. Not only did Jesus spiritually mentor the twelve disciples but he shared spiritual resources to empower and encourage spiritual growth in the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-30), with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), with Mary (Luke 10:38-42), and with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10; Huff-Fletcher 33-38). In Titus 2:3-5, “older women in the church were to mentor and teach the

younger women in areas related to their behavior, roles, and work” (Eenigenburg 73).

Both men and women were involved in mentoring in the New Testament.

In Philippians 2:19-30, Paul describes the assistance he had received from Epaphroditus and Timothy, a beautiful model of discipleship, mentoring, and missions. Paul had a unique relationship with Timothy. Timothy and Paul were like-minded people: “I have no one else like him” (Phil. 2:20, NIV). I would more literally translate the passage as, “I have no one else like souled.” In other words, Paul is saying, “I have no one else who thinks and feels as I do.” For Paul, Timothy was his alter ego, his soul mate (translated as “kindred spirit” in the NASB). Paul describes Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:17 as “my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church” (NIV). Timothy provides a valuable model for anyone desiring to be involved in a mentoring relationship because he was someone who “was genuinely concerned” (Phil. 2:20 ESV), who “had a proven worth” (Phil. 2:22), and who “served” with Paul (Phil. 2:23).

Spiritual mentoring centers on helping people mature in Christ, that is, to become conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:28-29), yet the Bible clarifies that this union with Christ will not be fully realized until Christ returns (1 John 3:2, 1 Cor. 13). Until the redemption of the body, Paul describes a spiritual battle between flesh and spirit (Rom. 7), one that requires believers to present the members of their bodies as instruments of righteousness rather than as instruments of sin (Rom. 6). Christians are engaged in a battle with spiritual forces in the heavenly places (Eph. 6) and fight against the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2). As

members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), believers need the love, correction, admonishment, and encouragement from other members of the body of Christ (Gal. 6; Eph. 4). Spiritual mentoring is biblical and is one way that the body of Christ can care for one another. Missionaries benefit from spiritual mentoring relationships that encourage, support, and share experiences of growing with Christ.

Wellness

In recent years, the field of health care has returned to a more biblical understanding of the nature of health as a positive experience of well-being. Research has documented the connection between the various dimensions of the person and, in particular, the benefit of a positive spirituality for all areas of wellness.

Definition of Wellness

The medical profession has changed their understanding of the meaning of health or wellness. Forty years ago, a person was healthy when physical diseases or mental disorders were nonexistent. In 1947, the World Health Organization (WHO) did not include the spiritual dimension in their definition of health (Witmer and Sweeney 140; Wills 425). In 1958, Halbert L. Dunn issued a call to “high-level wellness,” which promoted a positive sense of good health and required consideration of both spiritual and physical components to bring patients to a point of good health (788-89). Health has gradually progressed “from an emphasis on treating problems, to preventing problems, to promoting positive development” (Moore and Keyes 5). Wellness is now a “positive approach to living” (Hettler 78). Researchers consider well-being to be “the proper functioning of persons as integrated systems” (Ellison and Smith 36). From a Christian perspective, well-being exists when a person is functioning as God intended (36). For the

purposes of this study, I am using well-being and wellness synonymously although some researchers believe that well-being is a narrower term than is wellness (Keckler 1).

Multidimensional Nature of Wellness

If one is considered healthy, one is said to possess well-being. The 1998 definition for health from the WHO now includes the following: “[H]ealth is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Robert, Young, and Kelly 166). A wellness approach to health assists people to maintain a healthy and normal life but also to achieve and function with optimum health (Witmer and Sweeney 140). Wellness requires individuals to be active and involved in making choices to live a more successful and healthy life (Hettler 77). The benefits of a focus on wellness are well summarized by J. Melvin Witmer and Thomas J. Sweeney: “Healthier people are more productive, creative, cooperative, competent, and committed; miss fewer workday; and have fewer illnesses” (146). A positive pursuit of wellness rather than an avoidance of illness provides benefits to both caregivers and care receivers, employers, and employees.

In a survey of health care literature in which the dimension of spirituality was considered an important element in health care, Margaret Wills discovered, “It is clear that the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit has been acknowledged by those in the forefront of medicine” (423). Nursing, social work, and occupational therapy are other fields that have recognized the importance of spirituality (Glover-Graf et al. 21). The recognition of the importance of spirituality is a recent phenomenon. For hundreds of years, many believed that science and technology possessed all the answers necessary for the problems that ailed humanity. As doctors began to see illnesses as more than just a

physical issue, they expanded *health* to include biological, psychological, and social issues. For many today, spiritual care is now an integral component of holistic health care (Wills 424).

In light of the rediscovery that wellness is more than just the absence of sickness, wellness is now recognized as multidimensional. Although Witmer and Sweeney describe eleven dimensions of a healthy person, most studies say that wellness has between four and six dimensions. Wellness involves the whole person, including the spiritual, social, emotional, physical, occupational, and intellectual wellness dimensions (Hettler 78; Keckler, Moriarty, and Blagen 208). Sometimes the occupational and intellectual dimensions are combined. Lois A. Dodds and Lawrence E. Dodds have an actualization dimension in which they combine achievement, learning, and professional development and list a sixth “organizational” dimension (“Caring for People” 5). Wills proposes a model of health that understands health to be “a confluence of the physical self, or the body, the mental self, or the mind, and the spiritual self, or the spirit/soul” (431).

A multidimensional understanding of wellness supports the mission statement of the missionary member care team with which I am involved:

In dependence on God individually and corporately, we foster a climate where field members and teams are aware of their multidimensional (spiritual, social, physical, intellectual, occupational, and emotional) care needs, encouraging, and equipping them to develop and maintain overall wellness through building personal relationships and sharing of resources (time, energy, funds, hospitality, expertise, and other available tools.” (Nichols and Nichols)

This type of wellness approach involves a “radical shift from survival thinking to ‘thrival’ thinking” (Dodds and Dodds, “Caring for People” 3).

Integration Necessary for Wellness

A number of studies describe optimal wellness as requiring balance and integration between the various wellness dimensions (Keckler 6; Witmer and Sweeney 140). Just as whole persons experience *shalom*, wellness involves the integration of health lived out in each dimension of a person. In discussing wellness, missionary member-care providers should avoid overemphasizing any one dimension. Craig S. Cashwell and Paige B. Bentley discuss the danger of spiritual bypass when spirituality is emphasized, independent of integration with the other dimensions of life (140).

Only with integration of the wellness dimensions can individuals move toward wellness or “whole person health” (Elliott 81). Tom Rath and Jim Harter describe well-being:

Wellbeing is about the combination of our love for what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health, and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities. Most importantly, it’s about how these five elements *interact*. (original emphasis 4)

Although spirituality is not included in Rath and Harter’s five dimensions of well-being, they acknowledge faith and spirituality as foundational for health in many people.

Speaking about the psycho-spiritual unity of personality, Todd W. Hall and Keith J.

Edwards discuss how the internal dimensions of a person cannot be separated into

spiritual and psychological components since they are organically connected (“Initial

Development” 235-36). Optimum integration of the wellness dimensions leads to

optimum wellness that will, in turn, lead to an optimum functioning of the person

(Ingersoll and Bauer). Wellness is comprehensive as it is multidimensional, integrated,

and balanced (Keckler 206).

Because wellness is integrated, a wellness missionary member care model must not focus only on the spiritual dimension of missionary lives. Problems in any one dimension of healthy quickly affect all dimensions of life when ignored (Dodds and Dodds, “Caring for People” 4-8). When neglect of the spiritual dimension leads to poor spiritual health, the other dimensions of a missionary are affected. Leslie A. Andrews and Glenn Taylor in a study on missionary families describe the problem of diminished spiritual health: “As a missionary’s spiritual life declines, his/her sense of conflict and stress rise and vice versa” (216). Organizations and individuals should be concerned about the spiritual well-being of missionaries.

Continuum of Wellness

Wellness is dynamic or on a continuum, not static. In the wellness/worseness continuum, one moves from high level, optimal, or peak wellness, to low level worseness, which leads to premature death (Ardell 54; Hettler 79; Dunn 788). Because wellness exists along a continuum, wellness may be measured by the use of various instruments that have been developed.

Relationship between Spiritual Wellness and Overall Wellness

Spiritual wellness has generally been positively correlated with overall wellness. Many twelve-step recovery programs, founded upon dependence on a *higher power*, have demonstrated that an enhanced spirituality facilitates recovery from addictions (Wills 432). People with a high spiritual well-being are closer to their ideal body weight and have less incidence of high blood pressure (Ellison and Smith 39). In a study of patients with chronic pain, seventy-six percent of the patients strongly agreed or agreed that God or a Spiritual Power “helped them cope with their chronic pain condition” (Glover-Graf

et al. 27). Prayer, together with medication, was the most frequent routine used to deal with pain (27). Similar results have been found in patients with cancer (Ellison and Smith 40; Wills 430). Spiritual well-being is positively related to self-esteem and self-confidence and negatively correlated with depression, stress, and aggressiveness (Ellison and Smith 40-41; Wills 426). Tracey E. Robert, J. Scott Young, and Virginia Kelly discovered in a study of two hundred working adults that people with higher levels of spiritual well-being are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Wills cites a study in which “spiritual distress” was thought to be related to poorer health and an earlier mortality rate while a lack of spiritual practices may have increased the risk for psychological distress (426).

For those who accept spirituality as an essential dimension of wellness, spirituality occupies a core position in overall wellness (Cashwell and Bentley 51; Wills 431-32; Witmer and Sweeney 140). In Wills’ model of health and Witmer and Sweeney’s holistic wheel of wellness, the spiritual self or spirituality is at the center point (Witmer and Sweeney 140; Wills 432). Spirituality (Tidwell uses the term *spiritual intelligence*) “keeps one steady when all other capacities may temporarily be out of balance” (78). Despite the awareness of the positive contribution spiritual care can make to physical, mental, and emotional health, many medical practitioners continue to give limited attention to the spiritual needs of their patients (Moberg 53).

Apart from religious settings, few have determined how to enhance spiritual wellness. Noreen M. Glover-Graft et al. recommend more religious and spiritual training be given by rehabilitation educators but do not offer any program of training (31). Wills cites one study in which an educational intervention was able to improve the spiritual

health of the participants (433-34). Within Christian spirituality, however, the long history and practice of soul care or spiritual direction offers many solutions that may be used to enhance the well-being of Christian spirituality.

The spiritual wellness of missionaries influences their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual health as well as affects their capacity for work. Spiritual wellness is at the core of a missionary wellness model and so must not be neglected.

Spiritual Wellness

Spiritual wellness involves the ability to maintain a consistent emotional connection with God in the midst of the struggles of life. Spirituality and Christian spirituality need to be defined before beginning a discussion on spiritual wellness.

Spirituality. Spirituality is the noun formed from the adjective spiritual, which is derived from the noun spirit. Biblically, *spirit* is the immaterial part of humanity, and *Spirit* refers to the person of the Holy Spirit, second person in the Trinity. Logically, spirituality refers to matters of the spirit, either the human spirit or the Divine Spirit. Evan B. Howard broadly defines spirituality as “referring both to relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and to the deepest recesses of human experience” (10). Spirituality requires a relationship between the spirit of people and the Holy Spirit of God.

Spiritual wellness and spirituality may be interchangeable terms (Robert, Young, and Kelly 166). The literature does not provide any standard definition for spirituality (Lapierre 154). The medical profession believes spirituality brings increased hope through being connected to God and others (Wills 431). Although some have created instruments to measure spirituality across diverse faith traditions, finding elements of

spirituality that are common to all faiths is difficult (Moberg 50; Ho and Ho 64). Clearly, one's definition of spirituality has a direct impact on the understanding of spiritual well-being and any corresponding attempts at its measurement. With such diverse definitions for spirituality in the literature, this project focuses on defining and measuring Christian spirituality. Because of the tendency to confuse Christian spirituality with a popular understanding of spirituality, I will briefly mention one other type of spirituality.

New Age spirituality. New Age or *inner life spirituality* is focused on the self (Heelas 3). New Age spirituality is a humanistic, egalitarian spirituality that is concerned for human well-being above all else (5). Because this type of spirituality is often self-indulgent and narcissistic (5), David Y. F. Ho and Rainbow T. H. Ho call New Age spirituality a subjective well-being based on hedonism (63). New Age spirituality appears to be in the same category of non-theistic or humanistic spirituality mentioned by David O. Moberg (49).

Christian spirituality. This project focused on Christian spirituality or what may be called a biblical spirituality. Paul Heelas, who follows a New Age spirituality, understands key components of Christian spirituality when he describes a “transcendent spirituality” or a “spirituality of life” (55). This spirituality emphasizes “the otherness, power and glory of God, the authoritative nature of biblical text and the importance of obedience” (55). He makes a clear distinction between the New Age spirituality of the inner life and transcendent spirituality: “The god within and the God without cannot serve at one and the same time as absolute and different sources of significance and authority” (57). Even though other non-theistic transcendent spiritualities do exist, Christian spirituality has a unique Christocentric worldview (Ho and Ho 65).

In the New Testament, *pneumatikos* is the Greek word usually translated as spiritual and occurs twenty-six times. Spiritual things are contrasted with the material (Rom. 15:27), with the worldly or unspiritual (*sarkinos*, which is also translated fleshly), and with that which is natural (1 Cor. 15:44). The word *spiritual* is used to modify gifts (Rom. 1:11), blessings (1 Cor. 3:1), a body (1 Cor. 15:44), songs (Eph. 5:19), wisdom (Col. 1:9), sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5), and forces of evil (Eph. 6:12).

Christian spirituality involves a life lived in the world before the God of the Bible (Wainwright 452; Ockholm). One could say that Christian spirituality “at the level of *practice* [original emphasis] ... [involves] our actual, lived relationship with God through Christ” (Howard 11). Being spiritual requires one to have a relationship with God (Ryrie 204; Ockholm; Benner, “Nurturing Spiritual Growth” 358). Spirituality is the way in which one lives out a response to God, which involves a mature and maturing relationship with the Holy Spirit, requiring regeneration, control by the Holy Spirit, and time (Ryrie 205). This study focuses on spiritual wellness in a context of Christian spirituality.

Spirituality leads to a transformation of one’s life or, to use a theological word, sanctification (Ockholm; Cashwell and Bentley 143; Willard, “Spiritual Formation in Christ” 256-57). Dallas Willard describes the process of transformation, “Routine, easy obedience to Christ with reference to specific actions, then, is the natural outcome of the essential dimensions of our personality into Christlikeness” (“Spiritual Formation and the Warfare” 80). Howard defines transformation as “the process of Godward change,” which flows out of one’s relationship with God (13). Transformational spirituality takes place in the context of faith and community (Benner, “Nurturing Spiritual Growth” 357).

Spiritual wellness defined. Spiritual wellness involves relating to God in a mature way despite hardships. When trials come, the testing of a believer's faith should develop perseverance, and perseverance will lead one to be "mature and complete, not lacking anything" (Jas. 1:2-4, NIV). Spiritual wellness means a person will have an awareness and experience of God in daily life:

[Spiritual development] is the degree to which a person's relationship with God reflects the ability to maintain a consistent sense of emotional connection with God in the midst of spiritual struggles, and the degree to which a person is aware of God's working in his or her life. (Hall, Edwards, and Hall 195)

Spiritual wellness is not merely a subjective sense or feeling of well-being; it is not merely feeling better about oneself, as proponents of New Age spirituality would propose. Spirituality does include a subjective element, "An inward sense of the presence of God [is] ... part of our spirituality ... along with our community life and our expression of the kingdom of God in the world" (Howard 11). Like well-being, spiritual well-being is multidimensional (Benner and Hill 434).

A spiritually healthy person has a growing awareness of the daily presence and communication of God and is able to accept that God is at work even when life is hard. Jeannie Jensma discusses the importance of missionaries being able to recognize God's presence and direction in disappointments, "Seeing difficult circumstances from God's viewpoint correlates positively with satisfaction in all four areas —family life, ministry, missionary status, and spiritual life" (248-49).

Some see spiritual well-being and spiritual maturity as distinct, although related in a complex way so that at times, "spiritual well-being may temporarily decline during the early phases of a growth cycle" (Sandage and Shults 263, 265). Spiritual well-being may

fluctuate over time so that older people going through challenging life experiences may score lower than younger people (Hall, “Re: *Spiritual Assessment Inventory*.”).

Like all Christians, missionaries should be actively seeking spiritual well-being. The challenge becomes knowing when spiritual wellness is improving.

Measuring Spiritual Well-Being

Just as overall wellness is composed of six dimensions, spiritual wellness is composed of a number of dimensions. Charles Ryrie notes that spirituality is “more easily characterized than defined” (207), and says spirituality should be seen in character, knowledge, attitudes, conduct, at home and in the church. Wade T. Keckler, discussing wellness specific to missionary populations, suggests three clear categories: personal relationship with God, personal spiritual characteristics, and social involvement with other Christians (71). In the simplest terms, spirituality has a vertical and a horizontal dimension (Cecero et al. 226). Lawrence L. Lapierre identifies six dimensions of spirituality in the literature: journey, transcendence, community, religion, “the mystery of creation,” and transformation (155). In creating his model for spirituality, Lapierre did not limit himself to Christian spirituality.

In the Spiritual Assessment Instrument, Hall and Edwards evaluate awareness and quality as two dimensions of spiritual maturity. Awareness evaluates the degree of awareness of God (“Initial Development” 238). The quality dimension evaluates the experienced quality of one’s relationship with God (238) in four areas: realistic acceptance, instability, disappointment, and grandiosity. M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, Keith J. Edwards, and Todd W. Hall describe quality of relationship as “essentially a fleshing

out of the theological notion of a person's capacity to love" (195). Capacity to love God is influenced by and interacts with one's capacity to love and be loved by other people.

Awareness and realistic acceptance may be considered positive scale measurements while instability, disappointment, and grandiosity are negative scales. Moberg suggests that most spiritual wellness instruments measure "reflectors, accompaniments or consequences of spiritual health" (54) rather than spiritual health itself. Because growth is a complex issue that involves change over time, higher scores of spiritual well-being do not necessarily translate into growth. Higher scores on the positive scales and lower scores on the negative scales of the SAI, however, within certain developmental groups, should be considered positively ("Re: *Spiritual Assessment Inventory*"). In other words, a measurement of the spiritual well-being of missionary mothers of preschoolers should not be compared to that of middle-aged single male missionaries.

An important element in any instrument attempting to measure spiritual wellness is the instrument designer's definition or concept of spirituality. To improve measurement of the spiritual wellness of Christians requires an instrument with a foundation in biblical or Christian spirituality (Richter 40-41). Instruments assuming a broader definition for spirituality will be less useful for measuring the spiritual wellness of specific populations, such as evangelical Christian missionaries. The SAI is grounded in the New Testament and the historic spirituality of the church.

Some researchers have raised objections to spiritual wellness studies that use only quantitative methods in their research. Some doubt the ability to measure spiritual realities, which are "deeply felt but defy verbal description" (Ho and Ho 71; Parshall 10).

Indeed, using self-reporting measures to evaluate spiritual wellness may create potential problems such as the so-called *illusion of spiritual health*. People may *feel well*, but they may not necessarily *be well* (Moberg 54-55). Another problem in self-reporting measures is present within Asian cultures. Because modesty and humility are highly valued, Asian participants in a spiritual wellness study may be inhibited from rating themselves higher in known “socially desirable characteristics” (Ho and Ho 71).

Other researchers have shown that quantitative studies of spiritual well-being relying on the use of self-reporting instruments may credibly reflect the experiential components of spiritual wellness (Hall et al. 237). John J. Cecero et al. used multiple self-reporting instruments in an undergraduate population to discover what predicted higher levels of spiritual wellness (229-31).

Measuring spiritual wellness is a complex task, one that requires a mixed-methods approach. Due to concerns with quantitative self-reporting measures, both Ho and Ho and Moberg recommend using a combined qualitative and quantitative approach in studies attempting to measure spiritual well-being (Ho and Ho 71; Moberg 57). Instruments providing quantitative data regarding spiritual wellness can be correlated with qualitative data done through observation or through analyzing archival data.

Missionary Well-Being and Spirituality

Missionary organizations would presumably insist that their missionary members be spiritual men and women. At some point, all missionaries know “that, in one way or the other, Christ himself has to become visible in his life and conduct” (Bosch 56). In a 2008 survey assessing the training programs of sixty mission agencies, discipleship was the fourth most important area of training for new missionaries with 9 percent of the

training time spent on discipleship (Whiteman 7). Darrell L. Whiteman suggests that the sixth trait of a well-trained missionary is that of godly character: “Training in spiritual formation will help a missionary to replenish his or her soul during those desert times and wilderness experiences” (10). In a study of short-term missionaries, Keri L. Barnett et al. discovered that missionaries with lower levels of spiritual development tended to have problems doing their jobs. They advise a spiritual assessment be provided for all missionary candidates (37).

Although perceived spiritual maturity is a key criterion for today’s missionary candidates, missionary organizations may be assuming that missionaries remain spiritually healthy once they get to the field. Christian character may be the single most important attribute of successful missionaries. Robert Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis note that because character is hard to teach and assess, it is sometimes “overlooked, ignored, or assumed to be developed elsewhere” (qtd. in Whiteman 11). As former missionaries and missionary caregivers, Dodds and Dodds write the following:

In our experience, both as missionaries and care-givers, it seems the general assumption is that people will be able to feed themselves from the Scriptures, continue to develop their relationship to God, and grow in other spiritual ways with little or no help or stimulation from others. We have seen very little actual training in how to grow spiritually, how to feed oneself from the Word, and how to sustain oneself when far from a supportive community of faith. Few missions provide for pastoral care, regular teaching, and encouragement of growth. Spiritual growth happens co-incidentally for most missionaries, as they are pressed to God by the extreme stresses. But the lack of care also pushes some out of mission work and leads to disillusionment, discouragement and even estrangement from God. (“Caring for People” 5)

Although many missionaries continue to live spiritually vital lives, many others would benefit from spiritual mentors coming alongside of them in the spiritual dimension of their lives.

Because the spiritual and psychological domains of wellness are intertwined, mission leaders should be attuned to the spiritual and psychological well-being of their field missionaries in order to “prevent ineffective performance and emotional suffering” (Barnett et al. 38). Barnett et al. do not offer specific details in how mission leaders might improve or strengthen the spiritual and psychological resources of their missionaries. Richard A. and Laura Mae Gardner describe the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional vitality that missionary member care should foster:

By spiritual, intellectual and emotional vitality, we mean a growing, vibrant, and Christ-centered interdependence at corporate as well as personal levels. Vitality should permeate all aspects of life, providing purpose, present and future hope, stability, direction and satisfaction.

Missionary organizations cannot afford to neglect the spiritual well-being of their missionaries.

Missionaries have identified maintaining a healthy spirituality as an area of concern and stress. Joan Carter found “time for personal study of the Word and prayer” to be in the top ten stressors for missionaries (out of forty categories) and more than half of those surveyed rated this spiritual category to be a cause of moderate to great stress (174). Parshall, in an often-cited article, says that 30 percent of missionaries admitted that maintaining a healthy spiritual life was the biggest spiritual challenge they face (11). Dale Joseph Duhe cites a study in which “spiritual renewal” and “personal devotional time” were the top two “major needs or pressing issues” identified by a group of 287 missionaries (117). In e-mail correspondence with field missionaries about what they needed to maintain and develop their spiritual lives, members identified frequently the need for disciplined time in the Bible and the accountability of others (Nichols).

Missionaries sometimes find it difficult to maintain a healthy level of spirituality due to busyness, overwork, geographical and/or emotional isolation, and lack of fellowship. In a 1993 attrition study on OMF missionaries, Max Stevenson concludes, “In the final analysis, missionaries need to have an ability to stand emotionally and spiritually, with minimal support” (7). Maintaining a healthy level of spirituality is both an organizational and a personal issue. David A. Bosch cites two studies of missionaries in which both groups “admit that they are not as spiritual as they would like to be” (11).

Missionaries as *action-oriented* people, find it “hard to sit down to be still in order to reflect purposely” on life events and their relationship with God (Nichols). Jay Edward Hallowell, in a study of new missionaries, and Patrick Lai, in a study of tentmaker missionaries, both conclude that missionary spirituality is a topic needing attention. For Gish, the sixth stressor (out of nineteen) was time for personal study of the Word and prayer (239). Although in O’Donnell’s study, the spiritual area was not rated as a high stressor, maintaining a devotional life was the second resource used by missionaries to cope with stress (“From Rhetoric” 206). Field missionaries face challenges in finding others “interested in the ins and outs of developing a spiritual life” (Nichols). In interviews with returning missionaries, Alison Palmer comments that many missionaries face a spiritual dryness during their time on the field and upon their return to the home country. Spiritual exhaustion, neglect of the spiritual disciplines, lack of fellowship, and spiritual nurture, and spiritual battles are some causes Palmer suggests for the spiritual struggles missionaries face. One field missionary indicates that her personal reading and study of the Bible helps her to “maintain, not to develop” her spiritual life (Nichols).

Few missionary boosters (born before 1946) remain on the mission field. Missionary boomers (born 1946-1964) are beginning to retire. As missionary busters (born 1965-1983) move into the leadership of missionary organizations, missions will need to give more attention to the spiritual well-being of their missionaries because they will be requesting assistance. Compared to the disciplined boosters, boomers struggle to maintain spiritual disciplines while the busters tend to ask for help in their Christian lives. Missions should be ready to provide mentors for their younger missionaries because this group expects spiritual mentors (Stirling 55, 199). One young field missionary notes that she needs a mature Christian to whom she is accountable and who challenges her about how she is doing spiritually (Nichols).

Too often missionary organizations measure spirituality by the amount of work done or the hours spent in ministry. “This communicates a false gospel, an empty spirituality” (Dodds and Dodds, “Caring for People” 7). In an attrition study on sixteen missionaries, Laura Mae Gardner discovered a recurrent lack of Bible knowledge that expressed itself in “not utilizing spiritual resources” (310). Following a survey of the training programs of sixty North American Protestant missionary organizations that included training in spiritual formation and character development, Whiteman observes and warns about a general decline in missionary preparedness (12). Another problem from which missionaries are not excluded is that of pride. Independence and an *I-can-do-it-myself* attitude may render missionaries vulnerable to temptation and sin (Van Rheen).

When assumptions are made about spirituality, missionaries are more reluctant to discuss their personal spiritual lives with others. People in the home churches assume

missionaries are spiritual and may say they live on a different plane of spirituality, they “have arrived” (Duhe 7) or are “super-saints” (Van Rheenen). Because missionaries are considered spiritually mature, people think that they “should be able to take care of themselves” (Duhe 7). Another pressure on missionaries is the *missionary image* in which “missionaries are the choicest people called by God and have exceptional gifts that enable them to endure great trials and accomplish great things for God” (Tidwell 6-7). These assumptions may isolate missionaries from the spiritual help they desperately need.

Another challenge in providing spiritual care to field missionaries is many missionaries’ perception about member care. Missionaries are often unclear on the meaning of *member care*, so frequently those identified as needing member care are seen as individuals with problems. For some, member care is synonymous with counseling (Gardner and Gardner). The field of missionary member care has been largely developed by mental health professionals, and missionaries seeking the help of a member care worker have been viewed as “unspiritual or weak, and not trusting the Lord enough” (O’Donnell, “Staying Healthy in Difficult Places”). Duhe suggests a solution: Member care should be primarily done by field-based missionaries (90). In an encouraging 2005 study of African missionaries, 63 percent of those surveyed had utilized some form of member care services, and 92 percent indicated that they would use member care services in the future if they were available (Rosik, Richards, and Fannon 42).

Despite all of these pressures, missionaries remain open to spiritual approaches (Barnett et al. 38). Whiteman suggests that the spiritual development of missionaries requires a mentor (10). In reflections about the missionary organization that he established, Greg Livingstone recognizes that missionaries would not be successful in

planting churches among Muslim people without godly men and women mentoring them (209). In an international study of 468 missionaries, mentoring was one of the services desired and valued by missionaries with less than ten years of service (Trimble 358). Following her study of 245 missionaries and their children, Leslie A. Andrews urges missionary leaders to model a life of devotion to Christ even as they guide their missionary members to a similar devotion to Christ (116).

Mentoring has potential to enhance the spiritual wellness of others so that maturity develops and transformation begins to take place. R. Elliott Ingersoll and Ann L. Bauer propose that mentoring could be a way to develop the spirituality of professional school counselors. Mentoring and spiritual friendships are part of the “growth-producing spiritual resources” (Hall, “Christian Spirituality” 76) that may be used to increase spiritual wellness (see also Hall and Edwards, “Initial Development” 245; Whiteman 10). Benner describes spiritual friends as “friends that support your transformational journey in Christian spirituality” (*Sacred Companions* 16). Research has suggested spiritual commitment, spiritual practices, and spiritual community as resources that may improve spiritual health (Hall, “Christian Spirituality” 76).

Research by Leslie A. Andrews concludes that “satisfaction with one’s spiritual life is nurtured and supported in the context of caring relationships and the practice of the spiritual disciplines” (110). In a study of adult missionary children who had spent at least three years in a cross-cultural setting, missionary family relationships were the most important factor that contributed to a healthy spirituality (110). Community has been seen as critical in promoting missionary wellness: “Healing is best promoted in the loving, caring, body of Christ in intentional community” (Dodds and Dodds, “Caring for People”

14). Unfortunately, not all missionaries have *safe* communities in which to develop their spirituality.

The concern for missionary spirituality has not been limited to Western missionary populations. Multicultural teams must discuss personal spirituality because missionaries from one culture may expect missionaries from other countries to have similar values concerning spiritual practices (Cho and Greenlee 181). In order to survive the rigors of the mission field, Pablo Carillo identified Latin American missionaries as needing spiritual maturity, an ability to maintain their own spiritual vitality, self-discipline in Bible study, and spiritual support from team members (196).

Spiritually healthy missionaries are more likely to stay on the field longer. In a study of 240 Norwegian missionaries, Unddis Bergaas discovered that spiritual maturity in missionaries led to lower burnout rates (129-32). In an empirical study of 181 missionaries, Hall, Edwards and Hall discovered that missionaries with lower levels of psychological resources faced more cross-cultural difficulties when their relationship with God suffered (205-07). Andrews (107) and Keri L. Barnett (129) verify that missionaries' satisfaction with their spiritual lives has a direct impact on missionary retention, ministry satisfaction, and effectiveness. Missionary organizations are wise to give special attention to the spiritual dimension of missionary member care.

Spiritual wellness is best promoted and maintained in communities of caring individuals. Finding and sustaining caring communities on the field is often a challenge for missionaries.

Use of Computer-Mediated Communication to Provide Missionary Member Care

The core of this project involved the spiritual mentoring of field-based missionaries by using an online blog as part of an overall missionary member care program. I surveyed how the Internet and CMC have been used to provide missionary member care and spiritual mentoring. In order to provide a foundation for the online blog element of the project, I examined how effective online communities are formed and sustained.

In addition to the growing number of Web sites dedicated to providing missionary member care, a number of studies have assessed the possibility of using the Internet and CMC to provide missionary member care: “As technology develops, the job of the member care provider becomes both more complicated as well as more convenient. The question is not what is available but what combination of technology is most appropriate and beneficial” (Scheuerman 84). Technology should be seen as a supplement and not a replacement for personal face-to-face missionary member care.

Edward A. Scheuerman proposes that missionary field leaders utilize e-mail as a key element in their ongoing member care practices for their missionary teams. He shows how e-mail can be used to help members feel “cared for” when used in combination with visits, phone calls, and other relationship-building activities. His study reveals that personal visits of field leaders contribute more than e-mails in providing a feeling of being “cared for.” Unfortunately, field visits are infrequent in nature:

[T]hose visits may not be sufficient for maintaining a minimum level of care needed for a missionary’s sustainability. It is in the daily or weekly investment by the field leader that the missionary gets what he needs to press on in the work God has called him to do. (128)

Because regular e-mail contact between field leaders and members likely already exists, Scheuerman suggests leaders take advantage of this practice.

According to Scheuerman, e-mail care (e-care) has both advantages and disadvantages. In its favor is the asynchronous nature (not being dependent on time for a response) of e-mail (41). E-mail provides a written record of conversations, is more informal than a visit or phone call, and allows for better follow-up (46). On the downside are the technology and security concerns of e-mail. E-mails are dependent upon a reliable Internet connection, can be lost in cyberspace, and may not be secure. Advances in encryption programs have reduced (but not eliminated) the problem of e-mail in nations that exercise a strict control over religious freedom.

Despite the potential negative qualities of e-mail, Scheuerman advises field leaders to embrace this technology as a member care tool. Most field leaders already rely strongly upon technology for communication, and most field members regularly check e-mail. In Scheuerman's study, 90 percent said they check e-mail at least once a day and 55.6 percent check it more than once a day (112). Since Scheuerman's 2007 study, these numbers have likely increased.

The most important reason to use e-care is that it does help people feel *cared for* without a significant investment of extra time. Even though 20 percent of the members said a visit from the field leader made them feel more *cared for*, a prompt e-mail reply from the field leader and a phone call from the field leader were close behind at 14 and 13 percent respectively (Scheuerman 127-29). Short e-mail response times and an initiation of e-mails by the field leader were the most important aspects of e-care (133, 154). The frequency of e-mails was unimportant for over half of those surveyed, and a

two to three-day response time was adequate to make over half of the members feel cared for (135-36).

Both Joanne Schwandt and Jessica Sparks discuss the use of a Web site (Missionary Outreach Support Services or MOSS) to provide online mental health services for missionaries. MOSS was intended to provide e-counseling for field-based missionaries using a “Four-E-mail Exchange Model” (Schwandt 43). Schwandt’s study analyzed why the Web site had been underutilized by missionaries. Following are some of the issues she discovered: technological difficulties, theological differences, questions regarding the validity of psychological counseling, lack of trust in student consultations, lack of awareness, time limits of missionaries, and limited clarity of the process. Of interest for my ministry intervention is the discovery that missionaries did not use the Web site because of a lack of trust for individuals not on the mission field. Schwandt provides the following statement from one respondent:

They (missionaries) have had so many transient relationships,... experiences with people promising them things and then they don’t deliver,... unless you are able to develop a face-to-face, personal relationship, you probably aren’t going to be able to help them very much. (59)

Schwandt’s study led to a new format of the MOSS Web site.

Sparks redesigned the MOSS Web site (missionaryoutreach.net), hosted by Regent University, in order to focus on consultation (80 percent) with limited psychoeducation/interaction (20 percent). She attempted to create an online community for missionaries that reduced feelings of isolation and increased the usage of the site by missionaries (6).

In the redesign of the MOSS Web site, Sparks sought to facilitate the formation of online missionary communities. Her research was based upon the success of online chat and support groups in the medical and behavioral health fields (25). Sparks was careful to “meet the ethical standards that are evolving in the field of online community” (12). Ethical requirements include informing people about the risks involved in participation in an online community in which information cannot be completely protected (20). Sparks mentioned that guarantees of privacy were “difficult if not impossible,... where members post information that can be accessed by others” (20). Another concern in an online community discussing issues of mental health was the reliability of the information when nonprofessionals may be posting and making comments.

Sparks identified a number of factors that would help to create a sense of online community, thereby increasing participation on the Web site. First, the site had to be easy to use (11). Second, trust was key to building an online community, and trust was created through “interest similarity” (13). At the time of Spark’s study, *lurkers*, “casual observers who access the site, but do not actively contribute to the content” (15), were allowed, and she recognized that these lurkers may have kept missionaries from contributing to the site (50).

Missionaries did not participate in an online mental health community for a number of reasons. Missionaries were reluctant to be vulnerable as well as denied the need for help (Sparks 57, 59). Missionaries limited their participation because of fear, busyness, and *perceived* versus *real* needs.

Sparks identified two factors significant for the success of the MOSS Web site that are relevant to the current project. She recognized that to make an online community

a success, a “critical mass’ of active members needs to be reached in order to make it a self-sustaining community” (63). Unfortunately, she did not identify the size of the critical mass needed. Second, Sparks acknowledged the value of having experienced missionaries take on a mentorship role within the site. For all of the missionaries in her study, informal mentorships with experienced missionaries were crucial in their development as missionaries (65).

Another important member care tool on the Internet has been the formation of Web sites dedicated to providing information of interest to missionaries. One such site is Missionary Care (Koteskey and Koteskey). On the Web site in 2007 were forty-five brochures, four books, and a database that contained most of what had been published about member care to date (Koteskey 238). All of this material is free and may be downloaded anonymously. Ronald L. Koteskey wrote an article in 2007 suggesting that such a Web site provides information on “what missionaries and those who care for them want to know” (238). Koteskey determines what missionaries need by evaluating what resources they *click on* in his website as opposed to research studies that ask missionaries what they need.

CaringConnection is a similar Web site, established in 2004 and designed to provide resources, group discussion, and consultations for Assembly of God World missionaries (Tidwell 118). Michelle and Kelly O’Donnell provide missionary member care “reflections and resources for good practice” on their Core Member Care site. Missionary Care, the Web site of Caring for Others, and Member Care Media, the Web site of Transworld Radio, are also Web sites devoted to missionary member care. In addition, Ethne to Ethne has a significant member care section on their Web site.

Online Communities

As technology changes, online communities will likely change with it. The explosion of social networking in recent years is but one example. Between December 2008 and December 2009, the number of visitors to Facebook increased 105 percent (Calderon).

Not all online groups become online communities. Online communities are groups of people meeting together and interacting with one another on the Internet because “they share similar goals, plans, values and beliefs” (Bishop 1889). In their 2009 review of online community research, Alicia Iriberry and Gony Leroy identify the following key components of online communities: “cyberspace, information and communication technology, member-driven content, members’ interactions, and relationship formation” (3). Online communities are “carefully structured electronic forums where people experience walls, hallways, and doors with electronic locks” (Kling and Courtright 222). Once a clear purpose has been established, certain practices and processes appear to be prerequisites for online groups to become online communities.

Trust may be the number one element in creating a *sense of community*. Trust between group members is necessary for a group to “survive and thrive” (Feng, Lazar, and Preece 103). Trust develops over time as information is shared, respect is demonstrated, and communication continues within the group (Kling and Courtright 227). Group members want to have information about one another in order to develop relationships with others in the group. Jinjuan Feng, Jonathan Lazar, and Jenny Preece identify empathy in an online environment as a key factor in the decision to trust others or not: “Communication partners who talked in an empathic, accurate, and supportive

way were most trusted by the participants” (103). Enthusiasm, helpfulness, and willingness to take risks were other factors shown to increase trust in online communities.

Online communities provide a number of benefits for their members. Information exchange, social support, social interaction, time, and location flexibility and permanency are some of the benefits identified in the literature (Iriberri and Leroy 8). Online communities are formed for a specific purpose, so they provide a resource for needed information (Sparks 5-6; Lin and Lee 481). In addition to support, friendship, and entertainment, members gain self-satisfaction when they are able to help others in their community (Iriberri and Leroy 9).

The size of the group, members’ contributions (i.e., posts and comments), and the relationship development among members have all been identified as important elements to the ongoing existence of online communities (Iriberri and Leroy 10). The critical mass mentioned by Sparks is not only related to numbers of participants but also to the amount of information they share and discuss (63). Rob Kling and Christina Courtright were able to create an online discussion that engaged over forty doctoral students over a two-week period by including an interactive posting of replies and comments to questions asked (223). Apparently, as the volume of messages increases, members in the group tend to feel closer (Iriberri and Leroy 10). Low turnover rates of the community increase not only the stability of the group but also improve the satisfaction of the members (11).

Member loyalty has been proposed as being more important in measuring a group’s effectiveness than are the benefits that the group provides (Lin and Lee 481). Hsiu-Fen Lin and Gwo-Guang Lee discovered, in an empirical study in Taiwan, that

system quality, information quality, and service quality were significant predictors of behavioral intent to use and user satisfaction of the online community (486).

The level of confidentiality needed for online communities to thrive is unclear. Members want their personal information protected, but they also appear to want to know something about other group members in order to build relationships of trust. Member profiles have been one way to pass on basic information to other members of a group (Iriberry and Leroy 10; Kling and Courtright 227). In fact, in the Well, a community that has been ongoing since 1985, members use their real names (Watts).

The literature offers various suggestions for those who want to create an online community. Feng, Lazar, and Preece suggest moderators provide written guidelines to potential members so that they can write more empathetic messages and avoid contradictory communication (105). Once groups are formed, moderators should encourage participants to get to know one another (Kling and Courtright 231). Most authors suggest that novices to online communities be provided with basic information on *netiquette* (Sparks 23; Scheuerman 89-94).

Blogs are another tool that can assist the formation of an online community. Blogs can be an “efficient way to contribute, accumulate, enrich, and access information” (Wang and Hsua 82). Blogs, as interactive reflection tools, share knowledge, experiences, and feelings. Articles, posts, and comments are archived within a blog. Blogs may also be useful for encouraging the participation of more introverted members in discussions. Michele Dickey describes how blogs prevent feelings of isolation and alienation in distance-learning environments (280).

Blogs may not be suitable for all people and in all contexts. Anyone on the internet may access a blog unless the blog is closed or made private. Although a blog can be closed after a certain time, a record of that information may appear somewhere on the Web. In addition, for those unfamiliar with blogs, they may become frustrated with the process at the beginning. Members may be confused when a post is vague or unclear. Researchers should be honest about the extra time involvement a blog will require of potential research members.

Having used a blog as a supplementary discussion tool for pre-service teachers over two semesters, Shiang-Kwei Wang and Hui-Yin Hsua make a number of suggestions:

- To build trust, members only had access to the blog (84).
- They advise that the blog begin with a high level of content and questions to generate interest (85).
- They recommend that participants subscribe to a Really Simple Syndication feed, but they still sent out reminders to the participants to read the blog (85).
- In their blog, all participants agreed to make at least five postings per semester and at least two comments per week (83).
- Members were instructed not to use their real names or the real names of other participants (84).
- They encourage the provision of technology instructions before the blog begins to minimize frustration (84).

Spiritual Formation and the Internet

In recent years, individuals and organizations have used the Internet and CMC to encourage the spiritual development of individuals. Heidi Campbell refers to the use of the Internet to enhance spiritual life experiences as a “sacramental space” (111). In this sacramental online space, people find their religious identities, pursue personal spirituality, find spiritual support, and even discover a worship space (127-28). Some Christians consider certain Web sites or blogs today to be the principal source for their Christian fellowship and biblical teaching. InternetMonk is one example of a popular Web site that became church for many on the Web (Patton). Campbell, in 2006, identified Beliefnet, Crosswalk, and Gospel.com as spiritual online communities where people share their faith experiences. Significantly, Central Christian Church of Las Vegas, in 2010, started a Facebook campus. Many more examples will be appearing in coming years.

SoulSpace is one model that used the Internet as a sacramental space. SoulSpace was designed to improve the spiritual well-being of online students at Nazarene Bible College in 2005. Students responded to weekly questions by e-mail, participated in a weekly live chat online, and had access to a related blog. The spiritual well-being of the students was evaluated using the Ellison Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Lyke).

Lyke deemed his online spiritual program successful and identified a number of factors relevant to the current project. Although Lyke concluded that dialogue was essential to the success of CMC, he also warned that computer-mediated ministry should be seen as “an alternative not a substitute” (130). Over 70 percent of the students increased their spiritual well-being after participation in a group (105). Larger groups

generated significantly more discussion than did smaller groups. Lyke does not indicate if students in the larger groups increased their spiritual well-being more than those in the smaller groups. In his conclusion, he suggests that a group size of nine to twelve would be optimal to generate ongoing weekly discussions (122). He also recommends that the group cycle be set at six weeks (123). Lyke does not include a suggested weekly or daily Bible reading in his project.

As the facilitator of three of the four groups, Lyke admits that he was not able to be fully engaged as a participant (122). He also notes that in future projects, a better support system needs to be in place for the facilitator (125).

Triangulation Mixed-Methods Research Design

Triangulation mixed-methods research is a powerful and complex design in which both quantitative and qualitative data is collected concurrently in order to provide a better solution for a research problem (Creswell 573). When the same problem is studied using different methods and results in a convergence of data, validity and accuracy increase and researchers can be more confident of results (Greene and Caracelli, “Crafting Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs” 22; Jick 608; Hanson et al. 224).

Triangulation research is one form of a mixed-methods design that is driven by the nature of the problem being studied. When no single method is adequate or sufficient to solve the problem at hand, this particular mixed methodology should be chosen because it is the best possible solution for a problem. Others call it a pragmatist position: “the essential criteria for making a design decision” (Greene and Caracelli, “Defining and Describing the Paradigm Issue” 8; Datta 34).

Mixed-method designs allow for the combination of data from instrument-based measurements with the observations of data (in a live situation or in archival format such as a blog). Solutions may emerge when these two sets of data are analyzed or triangulated, solutions which one set of data would not have provided. A triangulation mixed-methods design allows one “simultaneously [to] collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data and use the results to understand a research problem” (Creswell 557).

Triangulation mixed-method designs assume “strengths in one method will counter-balance the weaknesses in the other method” (Jick 604). With agreement of the two sets of data (convergence), cross-validation is achieved with a resulting increase in the confidence of the results. Convergence of data is “useful for attempting to confirm, cross-validate, and corroborate study findings” (Hanson et al. 229). Triangulation is a method to eliminate bias and dismiss “plausible rival explanations” (Mathison 13).

Data collected in a triangulation approach will be convergent, divergent, or inconsistent (Mathison 15). When different results arise from the quantitative and qualitative data (divergence), a reconciliation is required, providing an “opportunity for enriching the explanation” (Jick 607). A more frequent occurrence is that of inconsistency among the data, that is, no single answer can be given for the data available. Whichever way the data leads (convergent, divergent, or inconsistent), researchers are responsible to build a plausible explanation for what has been observed (Mathison 15).

When data is collected from two different methods, often one set of data must be transformed so that comparisons can be made. Because no standard process for

transformation of the two data forms exists, bringing about data convergence has been called a “delicate exercise” (Jick 607). However, Valerie J. Caracelli and Jennifer C. Greene suggest that in a triangulation mixed-methods study, data collection and analysis should be kept independent in order to achieve validation (204).

When mixed-method designs are chosen, William E. Hanson et al. make a number of recommendations. First, a defense or rationale for using the method chosen must be articulated at the beginning of any project design (226). Second, the order in which data is collected, concurrently or sequentially, should be noted (227). In triangulation designs, data is normally collected concurrently. Third, researchers should explain the priority of the data. In a triangulation design, quantitative and qualitative data are given equal importance. Fourth, the procedure for the analysis and integration of data should be clarified (226). In triangulation designs, each set of data has a separate analysis and the two data sets are integrated only at the interpretation stage (229).

Summary

God desires *shalom* for men and women, God’s unique creation in his image and likeness. When missionary member care seeks *shalom* for missionaries, it is longing for a wellness and wholeness of body, soul, and spirit that is compatible with God’s desire. Missionary member care works in cooperation with God to restore a sense of *shalom* in each member’s life.

Missionary member care should be concerned with the spiritual and physical wellness needs of missionaries because Jesus was concerned with the spiritual and physical well-being of people. Missionaries need love and care as do all members of the body of Christ. Special care for missionaries has been shown to be grounded in the

examples of the New Testament. Spiritual mentoring is biblical and is one way that the body of Christ can care for one another. Missionaries benefit from spiritual mentoring relationships that encourage, support, and share experiences of growing with Christ.

Wellness is understood today to be a multidimensional, integrated approach to health that occurs on a continuum. The spiritual dimension is at the core of many wellness models and should be at the center of any missionary wellness approach. Because wellness is integrated, a wellness missionary member care model must not only focus on the spiritual dimension of missionary lives. Neither should it neglect the spiritual dimension by assuming spiritual health exists.

Spiritual wellness involves an awareness of and an experienced quality of relationship with God. Like all Christians, missionaries are responsible for growth in their spiritual well-being. Missionary spirituality is of utmost importance to the missionary task and yet has been neglected at times due to various assumptions held about the spiritual health of missionaries. Missionaries have said that they would welcome spiritual input from their leaders and peers. Spiritual mentoring appears to be an effective tool for providing spiritual care to missionaries.

Spiritual wellness must be evaluated or measured in some way. Because measuring spiritual wellness is a complex task, a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods approach is most suitable. Instruments providing quantitative data regarding spiritual wellness can be correlated with qualitative data done through observation and analysis of archival data.

Computer-mediated communication is a powerful tool that has been successfully used to provide both missionary member care and spiritual care for those in the body of

Christ. Since not all online groups become virtual communities, a *sense of community* must be cultivated. Trust among members appears to be the key element in the development of the *sense of community* in online groups. Groups with active participation, a technologically sound design, and consistent and reliable content have a greater probability of developing into virtual communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Missionary member care focuses on helping missionaries stay healthy so that they might better accomplish the task to which God has called them. Wellness “is a holistic multidimensional construct that aims for a positive balance along a continuum among various dimensions” (Keckler 14). Spiritual wellness, one of the most important dimensions of wellness for missionaries, may sometimes be overlooked or ignored. Missionaries may resist spiritual care because of assumptions about member care, the private nature of spirituality, or because a healthy spiritual life is neither easily defined nor easily described. Despite these challenges, member care must address issues of spiritual wellness among missionaries.

Churches and missionary organizations often make certain assumptions about the spirituality of missionaries. Churches that send out missionaries imagine missionaries experience a unique level of spirituality by virtue of their position as representatives of God. Missionary organizations recruit spiritually mature individuals and then presume their members maintain a level of intimacy with God. Busy and isolated missionaries may even experience a decline in spiritual health. Studies have revealed that missionaries self-identify spirituality to be a significant concern (Parshall 11).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of a six-week online peer-based spiritual mentoring program on the spiritual wellness of a group of fifteen field-based missionaries. The literature review demonstrates that spiritual mentoring is a biblical concept. Missionaries both desire and benefit from spiritual mentoring

relationships that encourage, support, and share experiences of growing with Christ. Peer co-mentor relationships are suitable for the spiritual mentoring of missionaries because of shared understanding, experiences, and trust.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the data collection and analysis. Research questions one and two were answered by looking at quantitative data obtained from the Spiritual Assessment Inventory. The information for answering question three came from qualitative data in the Kaibigan blog and a weekly journal question.

Research Question #1

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness before they joined an online spiritual mentoring group? Question one was a self-measure of spiritual wellness that provided quantitative data for comparison to question two. I collected this data prior to the beginning of the Kaibigan blog.

In order to answer this question, participants assessed themselves using the Spiritual Assessment Inventory. The SAI possesses two dimensions (awareness and quality) with five scales (awareness, realistic acceptance, instability, grandiosity, and disappointment). Awareness and realistic acceptance were positive scales for spiritual wellness. Instability, grandiosity and disappointment were negative scales for spiritual wellness.

Research Question #2

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness following the conclusion of the online spiritual mentoring group? Question two was a self-measure of spiritual wellness, which provided quantitative data for comparison to question one. I collected

data for question two following the conclusion of the six-week Kaibigan blog.

Just as in question one, the SAI responses provided the data. Increases in the awareness and realistic acceptance scales and decreases in the instability, grandiosity, and disappointment scales suggest improvement in spiritual wellness.

Research Question #3

How does participation in an online peer-based spiritual mentoring group impact the spiritual wellness of missionaries?

Question three assessed spiritual wellness over the life of the ministry intervention by evaluating qualitative data. I collected qualitative data from archival materials on the Kaibigan blog as well as from the weekly journal each group member sent to me. The weekly journal reflected an answer to the following question: “How has your awareness of God and the quality of your relationship with God changed over the last week?”

Participants

This ministry intervention targeted Protestant evangelical missionaries from an organization that serves in East Asia. Self-selected volunteers formed a convenience sample. Initially, volunteers were limited to field-based missionaries in active service and present in the field of service. Later, I accepted two field-based missionaries residing temporarily in their home country.

With the permission of the country field director, international personnel directors, and international research director, I e-mailed all field members (including those on home service) about my project. After twenty-three years of service in the field, with the last three years serving as personnel manager, I was well-known by our the field

members. Most of the field members also knew that I had been in a doctoral program. In my initial e-mail, I provided a brief explanation of my research problem and purpose. My basic question was stated as follows, “Is it possible to influence positively the spiritual wellness of missionaries through an online peer-based spiritual mentoring group?”

After providing the members with my definition of spiritual wellness, I asked each member to answer several questions. The first question I asked was, “As a missionary, what have you needed in order to maintain and develop your spiritual life?” My second question was, “What has been your greatest spiritual struggle?” Following these two questions, I asked, “Would you be interested in being a participant in a six-week online spiritual mentoring group?” Finally, I asked, “Can you recommend others that you think may be interested in participating in such a spiritual mentoring group?”

When members expressed an interest in being participants, I contacted them with information about the project and invited them to participate in my research project. The first fifteen self-selected volunteers who agreed to participate according to the guidelines of the project and who signed an informed consent form as well as a group covenant were included in the research project. In order to obtain enough volunteers for the spiritual mentoring group, I was also prepared to contact missionaries in other countries in which the organization serves (e.g., Thailand, Japan, Cambodia, and Taiwan).

Design of the Study

I used a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design to collect the quantitative and qualitative data concurrently (i.e., QUAN + QUAL). I chose a mixed-method design because of its suitability for the purpose and research questions. The basic question concerned the ability of a spiritual mentoring group to influence the spiritual

wellness of the group members. The elusive nature of spiritual wellness required the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Even though some have questioned the ability of quantitative instruments to measure spiritual realities, others have demonstrated the ability of self-reporting instrument measures to reliably reflect the experiential components of spiritual wellness (Hall et al. 237). Quantitative data for mental health scales may be considered more valid when scores are on the lower end of the continuum and ambiguous on the healthy or upper end (Slater, Hall, and Edwards 237). Qualitative data collected from the group studied allowed me to probe more deeply into the dynamics of the data regarding spiritual wellness.

Instrumentation

The SAI is a “relationally-based, psychometrically-sound measure of spiritual development from a broadly theistic perspective” (Hall and Edwards, “Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 342). The SAI is comprised of forty-nine self-report items in which responses are tallied using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “not at all true” to “very true.” High scores on any scale represent the presence of the trait. Two dimensions of spiritual wellness (*spiritual maturity* is the term Hall and Edwards use) are measured: awareness of God and quality of relationship with God. The SAI has scales for five empirical factors (awareness, realistic acceptance, disappointment, instability, and grandiosity). Two of these scales (awareness and realistic acceptance) were positive, and three (instability, grandiosity, and disappointment) were negative. The SAI provided quantitative data regarding spiritual wellness of the project participants.

I am aware that the two dimensions of spiritual well-being that the SAI measures (awareness of God and quality of relationship with God) may not reflect all of the

dimensions of spiritual well-being. Keckler proposes that spiritual well-being had the following dimensions: personal relationship with God, personal spiritual characteristics, and social involvement with other Christians (71).

In measuring awareness, the SAI asks, “To what degree is a person aware of God in daily life” (Hall and Edwards, “Initial Development” 238). Awareness relates to a person’s capacity to be aware of God’s presence and communication in one’s life. Awareness is based upon a biblical understanding of communication with God. As growth occurs in the awareness dimension, the ability to listen to and enjoy God should increase (237-38).

The quality dimension assesses the different developmental levels of relationship with God from an object-relations perspective, evaluating the maturity level of a person’s relationship to God (Hall, Edwards, and Hall 194; Hall and Edwards, “Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 342). The original quality dimension had three subscales: realistic acceptance, instability, and grandiosity. Hall and Edwards add a fourth subscale, disappointment, in a subsequent revision along with an impression management scale (350). Following is a brief discussion about each of the four factors or subscales in the quality dimension of spiritual wellness.

Realistic acceptance (RA) evaluates the ability of a person to maintain a relationship with God even in the face of disappointment or inner conflict (Hall and Edwards, “Initial Development” 238). A person with high RA feels protected and cared for even in the midst of troubles. RA allows a person to be angry or disappointed with God and yet believe that God is still available as a resource and comfort.

The instability and grandiosity subscales measure unhealthy ways of relating to God or potentially unhealthy relational styles. The instability scale may reflect a tendency toward a “chaotic and unstable relationship” due to feelings of abandonment (Hall and Edwards, “Initial Development” 237). People with high scores on the instability scale may experience feelings of guilt or anger when they perceive God has not met their expectations (237). Instability in relationship with God leads to excessive fear, difficulty with ambiguity, and trouble trusting God as loving. The SAI grandiosity scale may reflect a low self-esteem, an inability to regulate self-esteem, and a craving for attention (237). Grandiosity suggests preoccupation with power and influence may exist and lead these individuals to have a hard time believing God will protect and provide for them.

The disappointment scale assesses disappointment with God. High scores on the disappointment scale reflect individuals who have “excessive and unrealistic demands on God, which lead to a great deal of disappointment and frustration with God” (Hall and Edwards, “Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 353). Because disappointment is positively correlated with instability, it is “associated with an unstable relationship with God and fear of rejection” (353).

The following foundational assumptions of the SAI made it attractive for this study’s ministry intervention. The SAI assumes all people have a spiritual capacity for communication with God. The SAI, designed to be used with religious-oriented clients with spiritual needs, views spiritual maturity as holistic, possessing awareness and relational components. The authors consider empirical evidence, linking psychological and spiritual maturity. Writing about the unique view of spiritual development in the SAI, Hall and Edwards write that the SAI emphasizes “what would traditionally be viewed as

a more ‘spiritual’ dimension (awareness), as well as a more traditional ‘psychological’ dimension (relational maturity) that we believe is a fundamental component of spiritual development” (“Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 353). I chose the SAI as my instrument because of its suitability with a highly religious group of missionaries and because of its integration of the psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Pilot Study

Before beginning my research, I conducted a three-week pilot study. I recruited ten people to participate in a reading blog at testkaibiganblog.com. Of the ten people, six were regular contributors throughout the study. I discovered that people needed more help to understand how the blog functioned. I made the following modifications: (1) I removed extraneous html code; (2) after logging in, people were directed to the blog home page rather than the dashboard; and, (3) I added help files on the home page that explained how to make a comment, explained how to make a post, and offered a file on miscellaneous questions. After this pilot study, I decided to remove any minimum qualifications for number of posts and comments by participants. I also concluded that people should only respond to posts made by myself as group moderator in the first week. Following the first week, people could practice making their own blog posts. I also changed the blog so that participants could follow comment threads. In the pilot study, someone could not make a comment about someone else’s comment without making a new comment related to the post of the day. Finally, the participants needed a document explaining the concept of spiritual reading, which I prepared and provided to project participants before the research project began (see Appendix D).

Variables

Directed Bible readings taking place in an online spiritual mentoring group over a period of six weeks provided the variables in this intervention. For each week of the study, one Psalm was chosen for daily reflection: Psalms 1, 23, 27, 103, 105, and 121. In addition to the Psalm for the week, each day, as the moderator, I posted a different Bible passage for the group to read. The blog contained discussions about the reflections on the Scriptures read each week (see Appendixes D, F, and G).

Reliability and Validity

The SAI has been shown to be both reliable and valid for measuring spiritual development. I used Hall's measurement of spiritual maturity as my measurement for spiritual wellness, having assumed his definition of spiritual development as my operational definition for spiritual wellness. Hall, Edwards and Hall use spiritual maturity, spiritual development, spiritual functioning, and a "good relationship with God" to refer to the same concept in their writings and acknowledge that spiritual wellness is a related construct (194-96).

The SAI possesses good construct validity. Factor analysis using the Scree test supports the use of the five factors (realistic acceptance, instability, grandiosity, disappointment, and awareness) in the revised SAI (Hall and Edwards, "Spiritual Assessment" 345). Confirmatory factor analysis "suggested the five factor model is a very good approximation of the data" (345).

Both the awareness and the quality dimensions of the SAI demonstrated good internal consistency or reliability. The five empirical subscales received Cronbach's alpha values between 0.73 and 0.95 (Hall and Edwards, "Spiritual Assessment" 346).

Hall and Edwards found a moderate correlation between the awareness and quality dimensions of .46 (“Initial Development” 242). Awareness positively correlated with realistic acceptance, less so with grandiosity and negatively correlated with instability. Instability positively correlated with grandiosity and disappointment.

Validity of the SAI has been demonstrated through correlations with other empirical studies:

Correlations of SAI subscale scores with the Bell Object Relations Inventory (BORI; Bell, 1991), the Intrinsic/Extrinsic—Revised (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison, 1983), and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Emmons, 1984, 1987) generally supported the construct validity of the instrument. (Hall, Edwards, and Hall 199)

These results provide confidence in the validity of the SAI.

The SAI had a positive correlation with the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) with a substantial relationship between awareness of God and spiritual well-being in the satisfaction dimension. However, Hall and Edwards discovered the quality dimension to be “relatively independent of spiritual well-being or satisfaction with one’s relationship with God and with life” in the SWBS (“Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 352). With the quality dimension, the SAI measures a dimension not previously evaluated by the SWBS.

I was concerned with establishing the validity of the qualitative data from this ministry project and employed triangulation and member checking to test validity of my findings. Triangulation is a method in which evidence from different individuals, different methods, and different data types is examined to see if it corroborates findings of any identified themes (Creswell 266). In the case of this study, triangulation meant comparing quantitative data collected from the SAI with the qualitative data from the

Kaibigan blog. I collected data from weekly journal prompts as well as from posts and comments made within the blog.

Once themes had been identified from the qualitative data, participants evaluated the tentative conclusions. In this way, “member checking” ensures that “the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative” (Creswell 267). I made appropriate modifications of my conclusions following the *member checking* process.

Data Collection

Prior to the beginning of the Kaibigan blog, I sent participants a link to SurveyMonkey where all members could fill out the SAI. Before beginning the SAI, members were required to fill in demographic data on SurveyMonkey. Following the conclusion of the Kaibigan blog, I sent another link to SurveyMonkey so that participants could fill out the SAI a second time.

Qualitative data arose out of archival material collected in the blog as well as from the weekly journal from each group member sent to the moderator. Each participant sent a weekly journal reflection about the project via e-mail to me. I converted these weekly journals from each participant into documents. The weekly journal prompt answered the question, “How have your awareness of God and the quality of your relationship with God changed (if any) over the last week?”

In triangulation designs, data is collected concurrently (Hanson et al.):

[Concurrent data or simultaneous collection] represents the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods in which there is limited interaction between the two sources of data during the data collection stage, but the findings complement one another at the data interpretation stage. (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner 115)

The quantitative data was collected before and after the ministry intervention while the qualitative data was collected primarily during the ministry intervention.

Data Analysis

In a triangulation design, quantitative and qualitative data are given equal importance. Quantitative data provided evidence to substantiate the claim that an online spiritual mentoring group could positively influence the spiritual wellness of group members. Quantitative data provided answers to research questions one and two.

I analyzed the quantitative data by using descriptive measures. First, I calculated the mean and mode for each of the five scales of the SAI in both the pretest and the posttest phases. I sought to provide inferential measures by using the *t*-test to analyze the pretest and posttest data measurements for each of the five scales of the SAI. I then calculated the *p-value* for each scale to determine the strength of the evidence against a possible null hypothesis that the research project significantly influenced the SAI test results (Sterne and Smith 226).

Archival qualitative data from the Kaibigan blog and the weekly journal prompts, when analyzed, provided themes that confirmed, contradicted, or were inconsistent with the quantitative data regarding improved spiritual wellness. Quantitative and qualitative data were compared and integrated following data collection and analysis. When independence can be maintained during data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases, convergent validity from different data collection methods is strengthened (Caracelli and Greene 204).

Ethical Procedures

Of primary importance in psychosocial research conducted on the Internet is the protection of any collected confidential personal data. Before this project began, I required participants to read the Kaibigan Blog Essentials, a document outlining the project (see Appendix F). I then requested e-mail acknowledgement of the Participation Agreement, which included an informed consent section (see Appendix E). M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Stephen M. Sweatman suggest that ethical missionary assessments should communicate clearly the purpose of the assessment, use purposeful methodology, avoid discrimination, and focus on caring for the well-being of the missionary (250).

I needed to protect confidential data collected from three sources. Robert Kraut et al. describe a breach of confidentiality as one of the greatest risks of online research. In breaches of confidentiality, “private, identifiable information is disclosed outside of the research context” (109). First, as participants completed the SAI on SurveyMonkey, I needed to protect both the raw data and the statistical summaries calculated from the data and converted to document files. Second, I needed to protect the comments made by participants on the Kaibigan blog from outside observers. Third, I needed to guard the privacy of the data from the blog that had been converted into documents. I modified or altered the quoted text in order to “avoid possible disclosure of identifiable private information outside of the research context” (112). Fourth, I needed to protect the weekly journal reflections each participant sent to me that had been converted into documents.

In order to protect data on SurveyMonkey, I used the enhanced security option for the data. This option uses SSL encryption:

SSL is short for **Secure Sockets Layer**, and it is a protocol initially developed for transmitting private documents or information via the

Internet. It essentially works through a cryptographic system that secures a connection between a client and a server. (SurveyMonkey)

Both the URL and the instrument data were encrypted. I sent a unique user name and password to each member of the project so that he or she could access SurveyMonkey. I am the only one who had access and could download the data from SurveyMonkey.

Kaibigan was a closed blog. Only individuals with a user name and password had access to the blog. Each group member chose a unique user name to log on to Kaibigan. I instructed members not to use their personal names as their user names. Only Kaibigan members could access, comment, and post on the blog. In the group covenant, participants agreed not to give nonparticipants access to the blog and not to share information with nonparticipants. Following the completion of the project, the blog was shut down and all data removed.

All documents were kept on my laptop and encrypted using Truecrypt, data protection software using multiple encryption algorithms. I backed up data onto a password protected and encrypted external hard drive. I informed the participants of my attempts to protect their data but acknowledged the danger of privacy violations in online projects: "Confidentiality can be a goal; however, guarantees of privacy are difficult if not impossible, especially for user-driven sites, where members post information that can be accessed by others" (Sparks 20). I made every attempt to guard the privacy of the data the group participants had entrusted to me.

I informed each participant that the results of the data would be available to the entire group following data analysis. The group also understood that I would send a summary of the results with conclusions to the mission field leadership and planned a

journal article using the data results. At every level, I protected the identities of the participants.

For me, a key to ethical conduct in this project has been respect for project participants. Respect for members is a high value that my wife and I seek to maintain as member care providers, and respect has been essential to this project. I sought to honor the work of God in each of my fellow members during this project, as a “fellow heir of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7, NASB). We stand as one before the cross in desperate need of the work of God to bring us to maturity in Christ, maintaining spiritual well-being through the Christian life.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

I chose to focus on the spiritual dimension of missionary member care because of its foundational importance to the life of the missionary task. Churches and missionary organizations often assume missionaries possess a high level of spirituality, yet maintaining spiritual health is consistently stated to be one of the biggest challenges missionaries face (Parshall 11; Tidwell 79-80). When missionary organizations help missionaries to stay spiritually healthy, missionaries are more satisfied and effective in their service, are able to adjust to cross-cultural stresses, and avoid burnout (Andrews 107; Barnett 129; Bergaas).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of a six-week online peer-based spiritual mentoring program on the spiritual wellness of a group of twelve field-based missionaries. As the group engaged in formational reading of the text of Scripture on the Kaibigan blog, we became peer mentors of one another.

I made daily posts of the Scriptures the group would be reading on the blog. After participants read and meditated upon the Scripture texts, they shared with the other members of the group how God spoke to them from the Scripture they had read. Members shared their reflections when they posted comments on the Kaibigan blog.

In order to determine the impact of the Kaibigan blog upon the spiritual well-being of the missionary participants, I measured the spiritual well-being of Kaibigan blog members using the five scales of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory. Each blog member took the SAI before the project began and immediately following the conclusion of the

project. A quantitative analysis of the mean differences between the SAI pretest and posttest provide one basis for evaluating the impact of the Kaibigan blog.

In addition, the comments of the participants during the blog provided qualitative data that I thematically analyzed to determine the impact of the Kaibigan blog. I collected the daily comments of the participants from the blog. I also gathered answers from participants regarding a question about their awareness of God and their experience of God during that week. In the remainder of this chapter, I analyze the quantitative and qualitative data to determine the impact of the Kaibigan blog on the spiritual wellness of a group of fifteen missionaries.

Participants

Fifteen volunteers participated in the study, all field missionaries. Two of these fifteen were on home assignment in their home country during the Kaibigan blog. The rest of the participants were missionaries living in the Philippines. Figures 4.1-4.3 illustrate the demographic data of the participants. Nine women and six men participated. Eleven were married and four were single. Kaibigan was an experienced group with eleven being missionaries for more than fifteen years, two had been missionaries between five and ten years, and only two had been missionaries less than five years. For four of the participants, English was their second language. Six were American, three were British, and two were Dutch. One person came from Canada, Germany, Korea, and Australia. I asked the participants how much time they spent daily on the Internet to evaluate how comfortable they were in using computer technology. Three participants indicated that they spent an average of five hours a day on the Internet. Eight indicated

that they spent between one and three hours on the Internet. Two people indicated that they spent less than one hour a day on the Internet, and two did not answer this question.

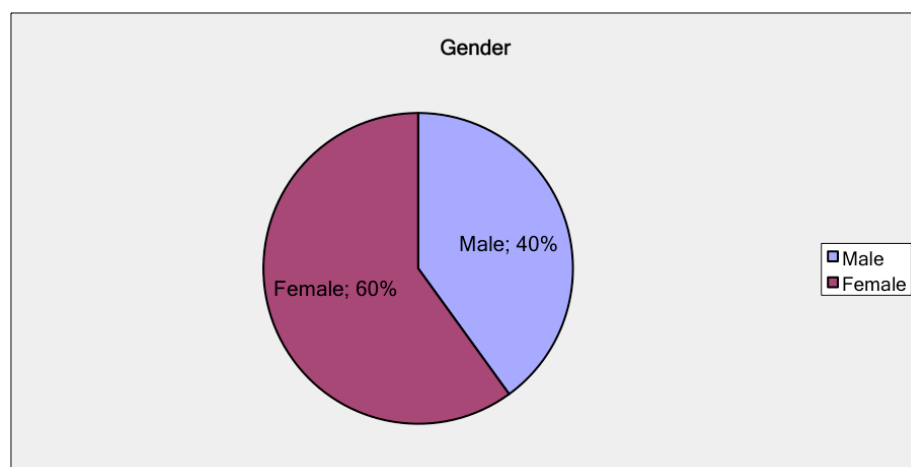


Figure 4.1. Gender of participants.

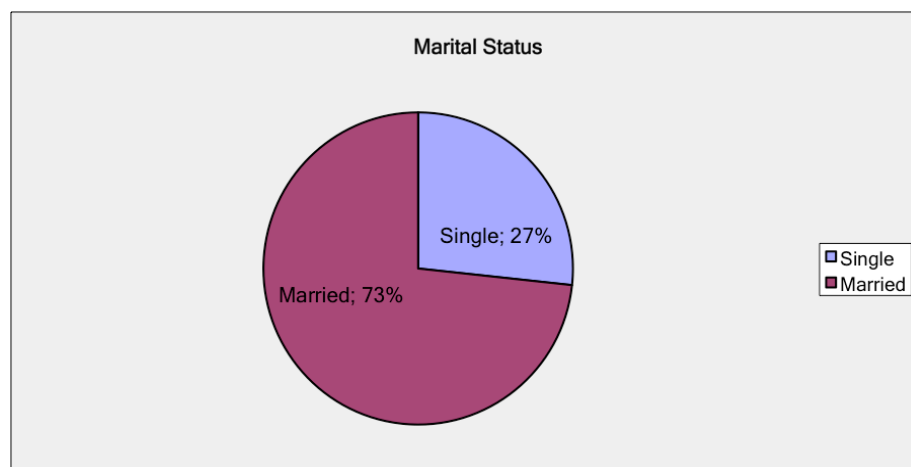


Figure 4.2. Marital status of participants.

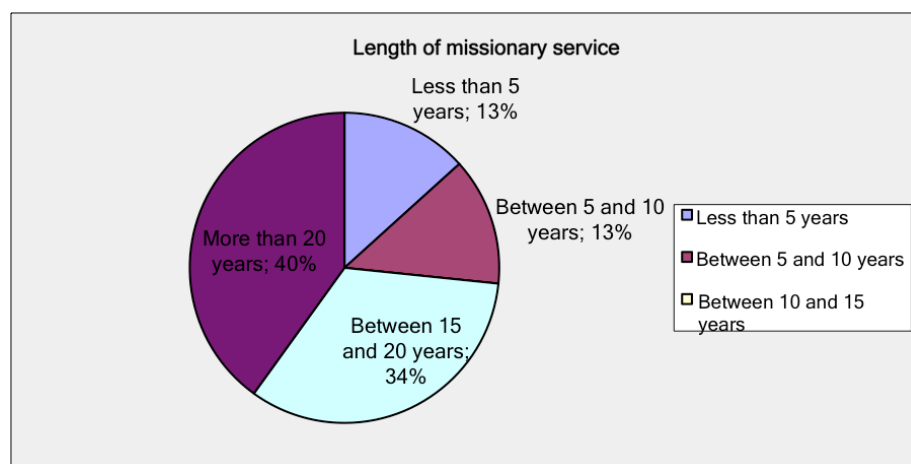


Figure 4.3. Length of missionary service of participants.

Out of the fifteen participants, only fourteen were able to take the pretest of the SAI before the project began, but all fifteen took the posttest. No one dropped out of the project although one member had limited participation due to Internet problems and one member's schedule prevented consistent participation. Most members consistently participated in the project. Members made over one hundred comments each week except for week five (see Figure 4.4). One-third of the comments were replies to other people's

comments. Over the course of the six weeks, members added an average of 8.74 comments per day (see Figure 4.5). Although some people participated more than others on a daily basis, participation was broad with all fifteen participants commenting during one week and fourteen of the participants commenting in four of the six weeks. In only one week did just thirteen of the fifteen participants make comments.

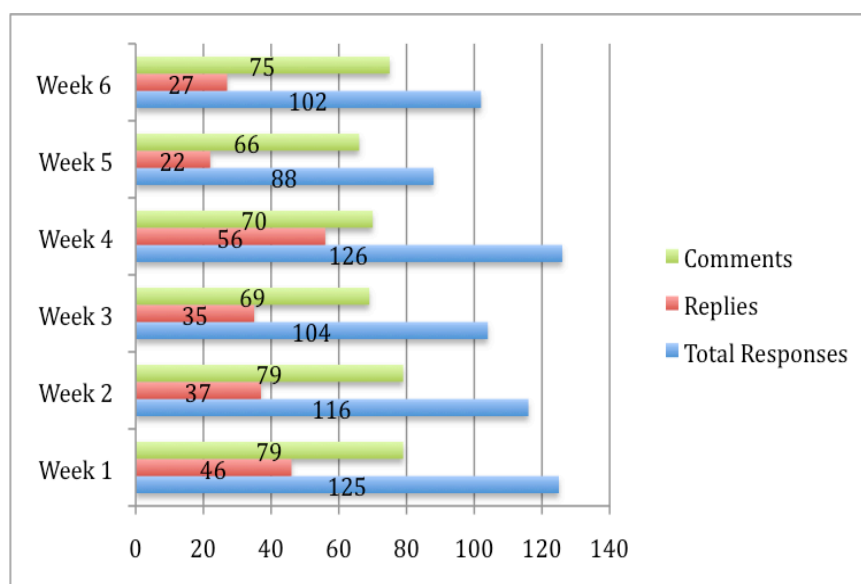


Figure 4.4. Comments of participants per week.

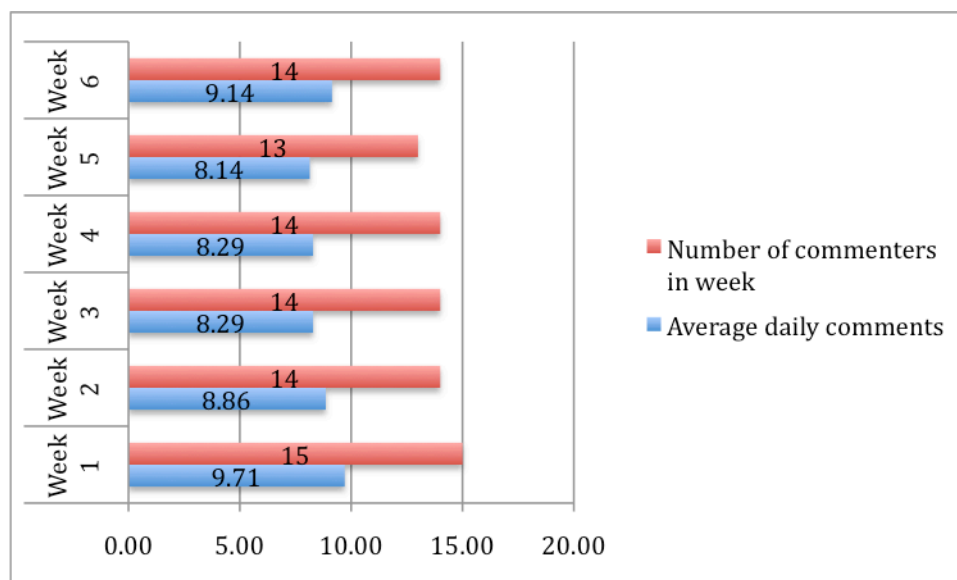


Figure 4.5. Number of members commenting weekly.

Research Questions

In order to answer research questions one and two, I analyzed the quantitative data from the self-reporting responses of participants regarding their spiritual well-being from the Spiritual Assessment Inventory.

Research Question #1

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness before they joined an online spiritual mentoring group?

Research Question #2

How did participants evaluate their spiritual wellness following the conclusion of the online spiritual mentoring group?

The SAI contained forty-nine questions that evaluated two dimensions of spiritual wellness: awareness of God and quality of relationship with God. The awareness of God dimension used one scale, the awareness scale. Four scales (instability, grandiosity,

realistic acceptance, and disappointment) evaluated the quality of relationship with God dimension.

Research Question #3

How does participation in an online peer-based spiritual mentoring group impact the spiritual wellness of missionaries?

I analyzed both the quantitative and qualitative data in order to answer research question three. Using the quantitative data, I compared means on each scale from the pretest and posttest data of the SAI and did both a *t*-test and *p-value* test to determine if mean differences were statistically significant.

I also used qualitative data to answer research question three. Each Monday I posted a *Psalm for the Week* as well as the passage for the day on the Kaibigan blog (see Appendix C). On succeeding days, I posted a new daily passage to be read along with the weekly Psalm. The comments of participants on these passages became part of my qualitative data.

In addition, I sent an e-mail to all the participants and asked the following question: “How has your awareness of God and the quality of your relationship with God changed (if any) over the last week?” Participants responded to this weekly question by e-mail. After week six, I expanded the questions I e-mailed to participants (see Appendix J). Answers to these weekly questions became part of my qualitative data.

I analyzed the qualitative data by determining the main themes that surfaced in the project. I then interpreted my thematic analysis to determine the impact of the project on the spiritual well-being of the participants.

Major Findings

Next, I provide an analysis of the quantitative data taken from the SAI, followed by an analysis of the qualitative data.

Analysis of the Quantitative Data

The succeeding section presents Table 4.1, that summarizes the key data from each of the five scales of the SAI, followed by a statistical analysis.

Table 4.1. Pretest and Posttest Results of the SAI (N=28)

SCALE OF THE SAI	PRETEST (N=14)		POSTTEST (N=14)		p*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Awareness	3.627	.719	3.80	.624	.315
Realistic Acceptance	3.739	1.266	4.262	1.292	.387
Disappointment	2.000	.806	2.030	1.054	.179
Instability	1.507	.281	1.500	.316	.176
Grandiosity	1.408	.371	1.459	.517	.225

Awareness Scale

Nineteen questions comprised the Awareness scale. Answers for the questions ranged from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true) for a possible total of 95. Awareness relates to a person's capacity to be aware of God's presence and communication in one's life (Hall and Edwards, "Initial Development" 238). Averages of the Awareness scale revealed a 4.97 percent increase between the pretest and posttest means. Nine of the fourteen participants (68 percent) showed an increased score on their Awareness scale. Four (28 percent) showed a decreased score, and one did not change scores. A *t*-test value, however, of .484 and *p*-value of .315 for the Awareness scale indicate no statistical

significance in the mean difference between the pretest and posttest means. A small sample size, a large standard deviation, and a high variance number limited the statistical significance of this sample.

Realistic Acceptance Scale

Seven questions comprised the Realistic Acceptance (RA) scale, part of the quality of relationship with God domain. Realistic acceptance (RA) evaluates the ability of a person to maintain a relationship with God in the face of disappointment or inner conflict (Hall and Edwards, "Initial Development" 238). Answers for the questions ranged from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true) for a possible total of 35. The RA questions were answered in combination with a Disappointment scale question. If the matching Disappointment question was answered with a 1 (Not at all true), then the corresponding RA question was automatically excluded and not used to calculate the RA scale score average.

Averages of the RA scale average revealed a 13.98 percent increase between the pretest and posttest means. Nine of the fourteen participants (64 percent) showed an increased score on their RA scale. Four participants (28 percent) did not change their scores, and only one participant (7 percent) decreased the RA score. A *t*-test value, however, of .289 and *p*-value of .382 for the RA scale indicate no statistical significance in the mean difference between the pretest and posttest means. A small sample size, a large standard deviation, and a high variance number limited the statistical significance of this sample.

Disappointment Scale

Seven questions comprised the Disappointment scale, one of the three negative scales in the quality of relationship with God domain. The Disappointment scale assessed disappointment with God when faced with problems in life. Answers for the questions ranged from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true) for a possible total of 35. Averages of the Disappointment scale revealed a 1.53 percent increase between the pretest and posttest means which is not expected for a negative scale.

Seven of the fourteen participants (50 percent) showed a decreased score on their Disappointment scale. Four (28 percent) showed an increased score, and three (21 percent) did not change their scores. A *t*-test value, however, of .931 and *p*-value of .179 for the Disappointment scale indicate no statistical significance in the mean difference between the pretest and posttest means. A small sample size, a large standard deviation, and a high variance number limited the statistical significance of this sample.

Instability Scale

Nine questions comprised the Instability scale, one of the three negative scales in the quality of relationship with God domain. Instability measured one aspect of unhealthy relating to God. Instability in relationship with God leads to excessive fear, difficulty with ambiguity, and trouble trusting God as a loving being. Answers for the questions ranged from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true) for a possible score of 45. Averages of the Instability scale revealed a .53 percent decrease between the pretest and posttest means. Five of the fourteen participants (35 percent) showed a decreased score on their Instability scale. Five (35 percent) showed an increased score, and four (28 percent) did not change their scores. A *t*-test value, however, of .944 and *p*-value of .176 for the

Instability scale indicate no statistical significance in the mean difference between the pretest and posttest means. A small sample size, a large standard deviation, and a high variance number limited the statistical significance of this sample.

Grandiosity Scale

Seven questions comprised the Grandiosity scale, one of the three negative scales in the quality of relationship with God domain. The Grandiosity scale had the lowest mean scores for all the scales on both the pretest and posttest. Grandiosity measured one aspect of an unhealthy way of relating to God. Grandiosity reflects low self-esteem, an inability to regulate self-esteem, and a craving for attention (Hall and Edwards, "Initial Development" 237). Answers for the questions ranged from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (Very true) for a possible total of 35. Averages of the Grandiosity scale revealed a 3.62 percent increase between the pretest and posttest means which is not expected for a negative scale. Four of the fourteen participants (28.5 percent) showed an decreased score on their Grandiosity scale. Six (43 percent) showed an increased score, and four (28.5 percent) did not change their scores. A *t*-test value, however, of .766 and *p*-value of .225 for the Grandiosity scale indicate no statistical significance in the mean difference between the pretest and posttest means. A small sample size, a large standard deviation, and a high variance number limited the statistical significance of this sample.

My analysis of this pretest and posttest data reveals no statistically significant difference in the means of the five SAI scales. A larger sample size over a longer period might have provided significant results. Data from the SAI, however, may suggest a positive impact of the Kaibigan blog on the spiritual well-being of the missionary participants. Almost 65 percent of the participants increased their Awareness and

Realistic Acceptance scores on the SAI between the pretest and the posttest. Data from the Disappointment, Instability, and Grandiosity scales proved to be inconclusive.

Analysis of the Qualitative Data

To determine what impact the Kaibigan blog had on the spiritual well-being of the missionary participants, I analyzed the qualitative data collected to identify the main themes and sub-themes. The goal of my analysis was to “provide a compelling interpretation of the data that provides a faithful representation of the lives of those studied” (Warren and Karner 272).

I used an *open coding* approach in which I was open to whatever themes came out of the data. As H. Russell Bernard and Gery W. Ryan note, “Mostly, though, themes are derived empirically—induced from the data” (56). I discovered these themes by multiple reading of the data, making notes, identifying key quotes, and finally suggesting thematic labels as I kept moving through the material (Warren and Karner 218). Repetitions, metaphors and analogies, and transitions helped identify these themes (Bernard and Ryan 57-62).

Some themes were identified by the degree of emotion expressed. Sometimes a theme stood out when a negative example of the concept was stated, which highlighted the many positive expressions. Disagreements and negative evidences at times confirmed the importance of themes (Creswell and Clark 134). When one person indicated their awareness of God had not changed, I noticed many others had experienced a heightened awareness of God. I paid attention to the number of people that mentioned a possible theme, the number of weeks a theme was mentioned, and the total number of repetitions for a word, phrase, or idea. By examining a collection of significant quotes, I also

identified key themes. I sorted the themes into thematic categories to arrive at four main themes with sub-themes under each main category.

I list the four main categories of themes with their sub-themes in Table 4.2.

Member checking confirmed that I was on the right track with these themes. During the blog, two participants confirmed my analysis when they suggested the key themes on which the group was focusing. *K* wrote, “Two themes that have been resounding with me throughout this Kaibigan experience.... It is all about God. It is also about community.” *A* noted that she kept “coming back to the same theme each week: the personal care and grace that God gives me, and the glory and honor He deserves.” I expanded the thematic emphasis on God into two different themes: God’s personal care and God’s praise. I then added personal growth as a fourth thematic category. Thematic reliability was further confirmed when I sent a thematic outline to a group of the participants. The participants confirmed that I had identified the important themes discussed in the project.

Table 4.2. Themes and Subthemes (N=15)

God’s Presence (n=15)	God’s Praise (n=14)	Personal Growth (n=15)	Community (n=12)
Challenges of life	All about God	Discoveries	Value and need
God’ personal care	Prayers of worship	Reminders	Accountability
Questions	Thanksgiving	Confessions	Encouragement
Prayers for help	God’s promises	Longings	
	God’s word	Relationship to God	
		Relationship to others	

God's Presence (n=15)

All of the participants, as missionaries, shared the experience of God's presence and care in the difficulties of life. Dodds and Dodds describe how missionary life "places one in a position to experience perpetually high levels of stress, as almost everything in one's self and one's life must adapt to new realities ("Stressed from Core" 1).

Participants described life as messy, tricky, and hard. Despite an experience of God's comfort and faithfulness, and many expressed prayers for help, members admitted that unresolved questions remain.

Challenges of life. Participants identified ways in which life was challenging, in five of the six weeks. People faced personal struggles: "Recently, I have been looking down, looking at myself and how hard my situation was." Cross-cultural living was demanding: "It is hard to demonstrate humility in a culture where pride is prevalent." Another person honestly said, "Intimacy with God happens in the middle of the messiness of life." In some way, all the missionaries faced challenges in cross-cultural living and ministry.

God's personal care. In the midst of life's difficulties, participants experienced God's concern: "He is watching over me so that nothing or no one will harm me." God's personal presence brought hope:

I have people all around me who love me—parents, spouse, children, good friends. Yet none of them can do for me what God can. He is the only one who loves perfectly, knows me completely, and can give me hope.

God provided comfort when it was needed: "Thank you Lord for your comfort, for carrying us when we needed you the most." God's faithful character was deeply

appreciated: “I celebrate as I reflect on God’s past faithfulness.” Along with the challenges of life, the missionaries received corresponding graces from God.

Questions. Even though the participants experienced God’s presence, they continued to ask questions. Sometimes members wondered about application of a particular text: “I have a question from this passage and no answer as yet—do I need to suffer for others?” Doubts were expressed: “Do I really trust Him that he has forgiven me or do I cling to shame and guilt?” People shared honestly: “Just how much like Jesus do I really want to be?” The Kaibigan blog became a safe place to communicate difficult questions.

Prayers for help. Prayers were very common in the Kaibigan blog. Prayers for help were the most common expression of prayer. People wanted help in their relationship with God: “Help me be aware of You every hour of the day.” God’s help was needed in relationships with others: “Help me to be forgiving of others, like You are to me.” People longed to see the bigger picture of what God was doing: “Lord, may my theology never prevent me from seeing what You are doing or prevent others from praising you for it.” Others needed God’s help to keep going in ministry: “By your Spirit enable me to not give up, to keep sowing, to hold out for joy.” The missionaries appealed to God as their source of help and strength.

God’s Praise (n=14)

In an appropriate way, God dominated the conversation in the Kaibigan blog. God was praised and thanked; His promises were remembered, and he spoke to the group from his Word.

All about God. One expression, “It’s all about God,” was often repeated.

Participants proclaimed that in the midst of life and ministry, God deserved the praise:

I have been reminded during these 4 weeks ... [that] the ultimate purpose is to bring glory to His name. It’s all about God and not about us and our perceived limitations. It started with you. It is all about you.

Members of Kaibigan communicated that God deserved to be at the center of all ministry activity.

Prayers of worship. As the group read and reflected on Scripture, participants vocalized praises to God, the words of the text often shaping their prayers: “Praise You Father for your mercy and unfailing love. I worship with fear and wonder.” People were honest about the limitations of their worship of God: “Lord help me to remember that you are the worthy object of my worship and praise—may I not be distracted so easily.”

Meditation on Scripture led to praise.

Thanksgiving. Flowing out of the prayers of praise and personal remembrances, members thanked God in many ways. God was thanked for his protection: “Thank you for the safety we can know as we keep close to you.” Participants recognized God at work even in the hard times: “Thank you God that present trials, niggles and troubles all pale into insignificance in the light of eternity with you.” Kaibigan members thanked God for the ways he spoke through the words of Scripture: “Thank you Lord for the reminder. Thank you for this passage to keep my perspective right.” Kaibigan became a daily place to express gratefulness to God.

God’s promises. Participants both remembered and discovered in their daily reflection on God’s Word some of the many promises of God:

God’s goodness and love are not like a shadow trailing behind me, but they are determined to catch me, win me over, cover me and capture me

with mercy and kindness. I am pondering the mystery of how God keeps his promises.

God's character and promises encouraged participants in the challenges of life:

The Lord doesn't promise that my life will always be smooth, easy, full of laughter, devoid of hurt or pain; that the future will be rosy. But He does promise to guard my heart: that in the midst of poverty, pain, suffering, hurt, disappointment, I can indeed find joy in His presence.

God comforted the members of Kaibigan from the promises of his word.

God's Word. Members of the blog valued how God spoke to them through his word: "My word is how I communicate with you. Enjoy it. Enjoy me." Participants shared with others how one passage read connected with other passages from the Scriptures. Many believed that reading Scripture as a group had a special effect on them: "I enjoyed reading God's word this week. I enjoyed it a lot more than I usually do. It is good to approach the scriptures each day with a conscious desire to hear God's voice." Two or three members appreciated the selection of the Scriptures for them each day.

Personal Growth (n=15)

All of the participants experienced personal growth during the six-week period of the Kaibigan blog. Many personal growth areas appeared to arise out of the participants' reading of the Scriptures.

Discoveries. Participants frequently discovered new truth in their reading, which they freely shared with the group: "I find these verses very freeing especially as I find it so easy to compare myself with others. I find I easily get discouraged when I do this." Members applied Scripture to their living situation as missionaries: "Fresh images and lessons on its [sin's] power to deceive and debilitate." God's word became relevant in new ways: "I find the passage especially helpful and challenging to me as a missionary. I

don't need to position myself to preserve my reputation or my legacy. He is responsible for me." Many members of Kaibigan read Scripture daily, expecting God to speak to them.

Reminders. Members shared stories about what God had done in the past: "More than 20 years ago, I had a life transforming experience. Just thinking about this experience fills my heart with praise and worship." Scripture often reminded people of God's character: "[Here is a] gentle reminder of my heavenly Father that He knows all my pain and questions." As participants remembered truth, they were encouraged to continue in ministry and in their relationship with God: "[I am] reminded that fruitfulness is seasonal." God spoke consistently:

Reminders of the priority of my relationship with God popped up in several of the Bible reading last week. So I kept thinking of it or was reminded of it again and again. It was as if God showed it again and again.

As people read Scripture, they remembered God's past faithfulness and his continuing relationship in the events of life.

Confessions. People quickly revealed surprising honesty about their own shortcomings. One common struggle was with anger: "Sometimes I feel justified in holding on to resentments." Others struggled with fear and doubt: "Sometimes, I am afraid of being disliked or not accepted." People acknowledged struggles in relationships and their own self-deception: "Have yet to fully acknowledge my wrong in one relationship." Reading God's word brought forth personal confessions that were shared with others and became confessions to God.

Longings. As people reflected on what they were learning about God and themselves from Scripture, they expressed many prayers of longing:

- “O Lord, may I run for Christ and not for myself, keeping him always in sight, and not turning my eyes on myself.”
- “I want to have the kind of perspective that Joseph learned: God perspective.”
- “May I never forget that I am not working alone—I have a partner and He is behind me all the way.”
- “May I never take pride in anything I accomplish without shouting to all that it was GOD!”
- “May he give me strength to endure and patience while I wait on him.”

Longings revealed the personal nature of the Kaibigan blog experience.

Relationship to God. Participants experienced growth in their relationships with God: “Pray for me—that I will take time to be still and enjoy the intimacy that my shepherd offers me in this Psalm.” Members shared how the pressures of ministry created stress on their relationship with God: “Keep coming back to developing my life with the Lord and not just being busy with ministry.” For a number of members, their time during the Kaibigan blog was significant: “I have found a deeper awareness of God’s presence in the daily routine and requirements of life.” Participants desired to continue growing: “I have found myself thirsting more for a relationship with this God I am reading about, and hearing through others of their experiences with Him: I want more.” People often reflected about an awareness of God in their daily activities.

Relationship to others. Growth in relationship with God led to growth in relationship with others: “How often my assumptions of God’s desires are communicated incorrectly to others.” Some saw immediate changes: “My listening was more compassionate and loving.” Others wondered what needed to change: “Am I a

blessing to the people close to me?” Kaibigan members attempted to apply what they learned in their Bible reading.

Community (n=12)

As Kaibigan went on, community increasingly became another significant theme. The lower number of participants in this theme (n=12) may reflect the Internet problems of one participant and the slow Internet connection of others.

Value and need. Some people were honest about both their struggle and need for community: “I resist my need for community.” Others indicated that they “appreciated” community. “I am organically connected both to Jesus and others in his family.” Growth in Christ was linked to living in community: “I am not a Jesus-follower alone; I am in this community with others.” People expressed surprise at the level of community that was possible within Kaibigan.

Accountability. Although the Kaibigan blog was not designed to create group accountability, people discovered accountability to be a significant benefit:

- “I think that being encouraged to focus leads me to meditate longer on the passage and this is helpful—group accountability.”
- “Challenged me to read the Bible more intently.”
- “Being ‘forced’ to take time to think and pray.”
- “I enjoy the challenge, the accountability, the discipline of looking at one Psalm several times in a week.”

The development of accountability with Kaibigan became a significant although unintended consequence.

Encouragement. People shared freely the many ways God’s Word and other participants encouraged them:

- “Encouraging to know that things aren’t finished without me.”
- “I have been encouraged to think of God-initiative and God-provisions.”

Over 30 percent of all the comments made were in response to other comments. This virtual dialogue led to many encouragements:

- “Your comment makes me want to spend some time in Matthew 6.”
- “You have expressed well the heart of the passage, in words that have challenged and encouraged me this morning.”

People even noticed the attitudes of other members: “You are so positive while my mind is stormy.” Sometimes one person profited from an application made by another member: “Thanks for finding this reminder to NOT try and fix people around me.” Encouragement appeared as one of the most common of all themes.

Qualitative Data and Impact on Spiritual Well-Being

Spiritual well-being assumes an awareness and experience of God in daily life even in the midst of struggle. Trials test a believer’s faith and lead believers to be “mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas. 1:2-4). Spiritual health enables a person to relate to God when life is hard. I asked participants periodically to evaluate their own spiritual wellness when I asked the following weekly question: “How has your awareness of God and the quality of your relationship with God changed (if any) over the last week?”

A few people found answering a weekly question about their awareness of God a difficult thing to do. One participant wrote in week 4, “I find it a bit difficult to put a

thermometer on myself every week and check. In a seven day span, how can I do that and be somehow objective?" At the beginning of the project, some people misunderstood the question. When I clarified that I was asking a *how* question and not a *why* question, that seemed to help. I tried to clarify that I was not asking them if the *Kaibigan blog* had made a difference in their awareness and experience of God.

Some in the group reported that their awareness and experience of God remained stable and unchanged throughout the period of the project. One individual wrote, "I do not sense any change in my relationship with God in the past week. But, I appreciate that relationship." This same individual also wrote, "Glad to have someone asking me this question each week." Another person wrote, "I cannot truthfully report on a change in my relationship or awareness of God over these past weeks." Perhaps this comment reflected more about the stability of the individual's relationship with God than on the project not having an impact on spiritual well-being. Kaibigan was helpful but not essential to members' relationship with God, "[M]y relationship with God is not really dependent on this project." I designed Kaibigan to encourage spiritual well-being but I did not want to create dependency on any one method.

The majority of the members of the group expressed that they had become more aware of God and experienced God deeply during the six-week blog experience. Participation in the Kaibigan blog did not necessarily result in a growing experience and awareness of God. Emotional and physical health as well as busy schedules had a direct impact on people's relationship with God. One member wrote, "I have been very aware of our Father's help in many ways, and the quality of my relationship with God has become more positively interactive (as a result of an improvement in emotional health on

my part).” After a bad week, one person wrote, “[I was] unwell much of the time, which has not helped me to have quality time with God.” An increasing workload led one person to write, “When my work load is getting too high, then somehow the awareness is getting lower.” For many members, Kaibigan provided assistance in increasing awareness of God in daily life.

People commented how careful attention to the words of Scripture made a difference to them: “I made a lot more connections between several Bible texts and thoughts throughout the day, in a way I am a lot more aware of God’s presence.” Another wrote, “Doing this Scripture meditation on same passage and pre-selected passages each day, has helped me be more aware of God—in a Scripture-centered way.” An expectation that God would speak from his Word helped people in their reading: “I have been consciously approaching the scripture with a greater expectation of God saying something to me, which has been good. As a result, I think I have heard God a bit more.” God’s Word shaped people’s awareness of God:

I was aware of a certain aspect of my life as a Christian that popped up in several of the Bible reading last week. So I kept thinking of it or was reminded of it again and again. It was as if God showed it again and again.

When people did not read the Bible, awareness of God decreased: “I haven’t felt as close to God, haven’t listened to Him as much, haven’t heard as much.” Regular Bible reading is part of an essential core needed to develop spiritual well-being.

Many had a deep experience of God at work in their lives during the course of the Kaibigan blog: “My awareness of God has heightened this week in many ways. I felt a real break-through over a matter of concern for me—that of contentment, satisfaction, and resting in the Lord.” A deepening of relationship with God occurred for others:

“Over the last six weeks, I think I have been more aware of the Lord, more aware of His love and patience with me.” The community aspect of Kaibigan blog was an important factor for some: “I have found myself thirsting more for a relationship with this God I am reading about, and hearing through others’ experiences with Him.” People mutually encouraged one another’s spiritual growth.

Summary of Findings

Following is a summary as revealed by the quantitative and qualitative project concerning the impact of the Kaibigan blog on the spiritual well-being of the missionary participants.

Quantitative Data

The quantitative SAI data is inconclusive regarding the impact of the Kaibigan blog project upon the spiritual wellness of a missionary population. Increases in the two means of the two positive scales (Awareness and Realistic Acceptance) suggest a positive impact, but no statistically significant conclusions can be drawn from the data. Based on the *p-values*, evaluation of any hypothesis regarding the impact of the six-week project on SAI scores is not possible. The negative scales (Disappointment, Instability, and Grandiosity) showed only slight and inconclusive changes in the mean scores between the pretest and posttest data.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data suggests an increase in awareness of God and in quality of relationship with God. The qualitative data supports the idea that the peer-based online spiritual mentoring done within the Kaibigan blog exerted a positive impact upon the spiritual well-being of the participants.

A number of the themes reflect an increasing awareness of God (God's Personal Care, Prayers of Worship, Prayers of Thanksgiving, God's Promises, Relationship to God) and a growing faith and humility.

Members of the Kaibigan blog reflected a growing realistic acceptance (the "ability of a person to maintain a relationship with God even in the face of disappointment or inner conflict") as they described God's personal care in the midst of the challenges of life. Many in the group were encouraged to keep trusting God as they were reminded of previous promises, discovered new truths, and read about the faith of others in the group.

The qualitative data was less clear in describing the impact of the Kaibigan blog on unhealthy ways of relating to God (measured by the disappointment, instability and grandiosity scales of the SAI). Evaluating whether people have a more stable relationship with God, see God as more loving, and are less fearful of trusting in his goodness is more difficult to discern in a short period of six weeks. Despite experiencing difficulties and continuing to face unanswered questions, however, the missionaries continued to worship God, sought God's help, confessed their own weaknesses, and yet expressed a longing to trust God even more. The qualitative data supported the low scale average (1.408 out of 5) on the SAI grandiosity scale (overly preoccupied with their own power and influence) of the SAI when the members of Kaibigan declared that it was "It is all about God." Growth in relationship with God and in relationship to others were themes that reflected a decrease in the self-preoccupied life.

The following four major findings are further explained in Chapter 5:

- Explanation for the difference between qualitative and quantitative data,
- Formation of a virtual community of missionaries,
- The SAI as a helpful tool for evaluating spiritual well-being, and
- Benefits of a peer-based spiritual mentoring group.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

I thoroughly enjoyed facilitating and participating in the Kaibigan blog with fourteen other missionaries as part of my dissertation research. During our six weeks together in a *virtual* community, we shared with one another how God spoke through daily meditations upon his Word. I am very positive about the possibilities for online spiritual mentoring of missionaries. Following the project, one participant commented, “This has great potential to connect people into reading groups that can genuinely make a difference to their spiritual life.” I have been pleased to hear from one of the participants that she formed a similar online group following the conclusion of the project and others have reported that they have gone back and read through the list of Scripture passages that were used.

Major Findings

Following are some of the major findings arising out of my research using the Kaibigan blog.

Explanation for the Difference between Qualitative and Quantitative Data

In Chapter 4, statistical analysis of the quantitative data did not conclusively reveal a positive impact of the Kaibigan blog on the spiritual well-being of the missionary group. Although the participants reflected a 65 percent increase in the positive mean scales of Awareness and Realistic Acceptance, the *p*-values do not suggest statistical significance between the pretest and posttest data scores. Mixed-method triangulation studies require an explanation regarding inference quality or triangulation validity (Creswell and Clark 146).

The following descriptions are possible explanations for why the quantitative data does not reflect an impact of the Kaibigan blog on the spiritual well-being of the missionary group over the course of six weeks. Since I am suggesting that the qualitative data does reflect a positive impact on the spiritual well-being of the missionary group, the quantitative data should be reconciled with the qualitative data results. To resolve the inconclusive results between the quantitative and qualitative data, one solution would be to collect more data. Jonathan A.C. Sterne and George Davey Smith suggest that the power of studies may be increased by expanding either the sample size or the precision of the instruments (229). A larger sample size may have led to a lower *p*-value for the SAI scales and provided a greater level of confidence in the data results. Multiple data encoders would also have increased the validity of the qualitative data.

Further suggestions may explain why the quantitative data from the SAI did not corroborate with the qualitative data collected. One answer may be that self-reporting measures of spiritual well-being are “particularly suspect” (Ho and Ho 70) since spirituality is highly personal. Moberg points out that assessments of spirituality are “reflectors, accompaniments, or consequences of spiritual health, not the phenomenon itself” (54). A related peril is the potential danger of spiritual health that is only an illusion. “Self-ratings of spirituality are useful, but they can be deceptive because *feeling well* is not necessarily *being well*” (original emphasis; 54). Self-rating scales may be even more problematic in Asian peoples who value modesty and humility (Ho and Ho 71).

However, when an emic methodology is used to determine what constitutes spiritual well-being, an instrument has a greater possibility of success (Moberg 56) The SAI is an instrument designed for use with a conservative evangelical population that

places a priority on the Word of God and upon the historic practices of spirituality within the church. The SAI demonstrates good construct validity as well as internal consistency reliability (Hall and Edwards, “Spiritual Assessment” 345; Hall, Edwards, and Hall 199). Although an imperfect measure, the SAI is the best of all possible tools to measure the spiritual well-being of a group of missionaries. I believe that had I extended the project over a period of three months or more and increased the population size, the difference between the SAI pretest and posttest means may have been statistically significant.

Finally, one danger of a mixed-methods study is the possibility that one form of data collection introduces a data bias in another form of data collection of (Creswell and Clark 120). In the current study, participants took the SAI posttest following six weeks in which each week participants answered a question about their awareness and the quality of their relationship to God. These questions reflected the two major domains present within the SAI. The weekly questions may have introduced a bias into the data later collected in the SAI posttest. As both the research-facilitator and a participant in the project, I may have also unintentionally introduced a bias into the data.

Forming a Virtual Community of Missionaries

Kaibigan became a virtual community for many, which is an important finding since not all online groups form online communities. In the weekly questions, people mentioned the formation of community: “I enjoyed the benefit of reading together, in community.” Group members felt a *need* to participate and some explained that they felt “annoyed” when they were unable to participate. When some members were absent, they were “missed” by other members of the community. One member of Kaibigan wanted to continue in a similar type of group: “I would love to continue in a group, be it here in my

city or via a blog. Even with anonymous people, even with the same people from kaibigan. I wouldn't mind the same format." Kaibigan became a virtual community for some members.

For two or three members, Kaibigan was not their "kind of thing." These members would have preferred "face to-face" discussions, knowing the other participants and not "moving around from one passage to another." One person admitted that his lack of "any sense of community" may have been "because I did not open up enough and did not respond enough to the comments of the others." However, this same person recognized that the group "served a great purpose for others."

Kaibigan worked for the majority of the members. One member described their experience:

I do not like the world of computers or internet. I use it because I have to. I tend to be cynical about virtual groups and the way in which real life is being supplanted by online relationships and networks. What surprised me about Kaibigan was how much pleasure I got from the brief time I was able to participate. I got a lot from reading other people's comments on the respective passages, especially if I had time to read them slowly and carefully. To be able to comment on a passage and read someone's response to my comments did not feel contrived or false as I expected it might be. I remember posting an explanation why I had been absent for a couple of weeks and someone responded with a "welcome back"; I was genuinely touched by their thoughtfulness. The emotions for me were similar to what I have experienced in a real-time group, which was a real surprise, and a pleasant one.

Kaibigan became such a virtual community for the group that many experienced an emotional let-down upon the conclusion of the group for which I did not properly plan.

A number of factors contributed to Kaibigan becoming a virtual community. I intentionally used *community* language in describing the purpose of the Kaibigan blog from the beginning. Members felt *safe* and shared without fear of being criticized. Trust

(the number one factor in the development of a *sense of community*) developed in Kaibigan as members shared information and respected one another (Feng, Lazar, and Preece 103; Kling and Courtright 227). I asked all members to commit to honesty, respect, safety, and humility in the Kaibigan Blog Essentials before the project began (see Appendix F). One member reflected growing trust when she wrote, “Sometimes felt I needed to say something to prove myself, but gradually accepted it was okay just to *lurk* [original emphasis] when I had nothing to say.”

I am not sure if the anonymity of the project contributed to the formation of community or not. Even though some researchers have discovered that having information about other group members builds trust within the group (Iriberri and Leroy 10; Kling and Courtright 227), I had hoped that the safety of being anonymous would facilitate more open and honest discussions. One person admitted that he would have enjoyed knowing the names of the group members but also acknowledged that being known might have been inhibited contributions. Most members, however, indicated that they would have preferred some agreed level of disclosure. Members believed that more disclosure “would have added to the sharing of lives aspect.” Another wrote, “It is likely I would have been more open if I had known who the others were.”

Results of the thematic analysis of the qualitative data uncovered a significant impact on the spiritual well-being for over half of the missionary participants. Members became more aware of God being present and at work in their lives and gained faith to trust his goodness and love in the difficulties of life.

Participants struggled to answer the weekly question about changes (if any) in their awareness and quality of their experience with God. Ho and Ho suggest that because

spiritual experiences are not easily articulated verbally, researchers should explicitly ask people to describe their spiritual experiences (70). Had I relied only on the weekly questions, I would not be confident in the results of this study. Blog comments and online responses provided glimpses into unguarded moments in which the participants honestly discussed their relationship and experience with God on a day-to-day basis. For many (but certainly not for all) in the group, the experience of reading Scripture together online over a six-week period had a significant impact on their spiritual well-being.

The SAI as a Helpful Tool for Evaluating Spiritual Well-Being

Even though data from the SAI was inconclusive, the SAI provides data that will help missionary organizations provide better member care. Hall and Edwards suggest that “individuals find it helpful to reflect on the items” of the SAI (“Spiritual Assessment Inventory” 353). The SAI may offer a safe place to introduce discussions on spiritual topics with field members. The SAI can help organizations identify individuals who have lower levels of psychological and spiritual resources and, therefore, who are more vulnerable to the stresses of missionary life (Hall, Edwards, and Hall 207). Moberg suggests that spiritual assessment tools are needed in the same way that the medical field uses physical and mental tests: “Accurate client assessments can extend knowledge about spiritual wellness, help to diagnose spiritual ailments, and indicate the spiritual care needed to restore spiritual health” (47). Organizations may use the SAI to begin discussions about spiritual health with missionaries.

Another value of the SAI lies in its holistic approach because it regards spiritual and psychological health as related and synergistic. A biblical understanding of *shalom* (Grudem; Van Leeuwen) and *nephesh* (Waltke) in the Old Testament and *soma*

(Wibbing), *eirene* (Beck and Brown), and *teleios* (Schippers) in the New Testament reflect God's human creation as "psycho-spiritual-somatic beings" (Benner, "Nurturing Spiritual Growth" 359). Individuals and organizations should note that the SAI has no norms for a missionary population. Further research to evaluate spiritual well-being over the course of a missionary career would be useful. Of particular importance are the early years of a missionary's career (Hallowell 2, 12, 199-204).

Benefits of a Peer-Based Spiritual Mentoring Group

The Kaibigan blog was a virtual group in which individuals came together to share with one another how God spoke to them through the reading and reflection of Scripture. Meditation on the word in community appears to have the power to bring about stability, bring humility, increase realistic acceptance, and deepen an awareness of God. As fellow missionaries co-journey before God together, God often uses community (real or virtual) to bring about a restoration of *shalom* in all of life. This well-being of one another should be a concern among Christians (3 John 1:2; 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). One participant described what happened as they read Scripture and waited on God, I began to "see things God's way, change unhealthy perceptions about God, and share struggles about how I have experienced God." When missionaries are experiencing God's *shalom*, they are functioning properly and in healthy ways with God, others, and self (Plantinga 34). As God matures his children, he brings about the undivided wholeness (*teleios*) of a person (Schippers).

A virtual reading group like the Kaibigan blog can be a useful tool for missionaries who need some accountability in their spiritual lives and specifically in their Bible reading. Ruth Haley Barton recommends the formation of groups "to support each

one as we listen to God in Scripture in a very personal way within this small community” (58). O’Donnell sees the “one-another verses” of Scripture to be the basis for missionary member care (“Staying Healthy in Difficult Places” 7). A member described what happened:

Overall, I enjoyed kaibigan, would like to continue with some kind of accountability and “good food” picked for me. I enjoyed many comments and God was close to me. I was often more aware of it than when I do everything myself without any group.

With the help of a facilitator guiding the group, a peer-based spiritual mentoring group has been shown to be a useful tool in caring for missionaries.

Implications

This project has highlighted a couple of key implications for missionary member care.

Importance of the Spiritual Life of Missionaries

Spiritual well-being among missionaries, like any other dimensions of well-being, will fluctuate. Because of the personal and private nature of the spiritual life and the difficulty of assessing spiritual well-being, sending churches and missionary organizations may be ignoring a dangerous level of spiritual health among missionaries. When spiritual well-being wanes for missionaries, as it inevitably will, they need help to return to health. Clearly, a strong spiritual life is needed to shape and sustain new missionaries (Hallowell ii). Most missionaries, if asked, would likely affirm what Hallowell says: “I struggled, though, with both my spiritual life and my missionary adjustment. Nearly all the other new missionaries I knew also struggled” (1). Lai in a study of 370 missionary tent makers states, “Workers often struggle to maintain their

spiritual, mental, and physical being while on the field” (131). Even mid-career missionaries need support in their spiritual lives:

As missionaries take on more responsibilities, it is easy for their devotional and prayer life to get crowded out. Getting grounded in one’s spiritual life is critical, and maintaining it through the various stages of missionary life is often the difference between making it well and barely making it. (Swanson 71)

New and experienced missionaries need assistance to maintain healthy spiritual lives.

Sending churches and missionary organizations must help missionaries maintain their spiritual health. Stephanus is an example of how an individual is able to refresh the spirit (timely for the emotional and spiritual well-being states) of a missionary (Ellis 173). The churches of Antioch (Acts 14:26-28) and Philippi provide illustrations of local churches caring for missionaries. Because of the importance of the spirituality in the life and ministry of missionaries, Jaap Ketelaar urges missions leaders and agencies to create “an environment and culture that helps missionaries make spiritual life a top priority” (135). Missionaries need “effective spiritual support” to cope with the traumas and challenges of missionary life (Carr and Schaefer 282). Patrick Lai discovered that cross-cultural workers are not as effective when they lack a home church that holds them spiritually accountable (132). Intentional spiritual support by churches and organizations is likely to reduce the attrition rate of missionaries around the world (Kang 252).

Bible Reading: An Essential Element in Maintaining Spiritual Well-Being

The reading of Scripture is an essential spiritual support in the life of a missionary: “New missionaries use the Bible in their quiet times to shape and sustain themselves during, for, and by their missionary adjustment” (Hallowell 14). In Lai’s survey of 370 tentmakers, he discovered that 85 percent of the workers have a daily

devotional time, but he also found at least forty-five minutes a day in Bible reading was required to make a difference in effectiveness (131). In my project, many of the missionaries expressed appreciation for the way in which the Kaibigan blog provided accountability and helped them focus on the necessary discipline of meditative Bible reading. An important benefit for one member “was being able to participate with like minded people in spiritual reading though we were separated by hundreds of miles. That to me is the huge and very obvious benefit.” In a qualitative study with first-term missionaries, Hallowell concludes, “[T]here is room for improvement in the quiet time use of the Bible by new missionaries” (140). Missionaries may need assistance in maintaining a consistent reflection on the Scriptures that will sustain them for the long-term.

In the Kaibigan blog, I informed participants that we would be focusing on formational or a spiritual reading of the Bible. I emphasized the Bible because “Christian spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by the scriptural text” (Peterson 186). The body of Christ cannot long survive without the Bible: “Holy Scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body (424). In the Kaibigan Essentials, I explained that we would be focused on sharing with one another how God speaks through his Word. Kaibigan was designed to be “neither a Bible study group nor a hermeneutics discussion” (see Appendix F). I asked the group to read and meditate on the selected Bible passages without specifying any time requirements. I requested the group commit to honesty, respect, safety, humility, and personal experience in their sharing.

I wanted to avoid a mere informational reading of the Scriptures and focus on formational or spiritual reading. I provided a document to all the participants, which

introduced the concept of formational or spiritual reading (see Appendix D). Spiritual reading is “reading that enters our souls as food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and wisdom” (Peterson 99). I encouraged the participants to expect God to speak to them and to honor the process and timing of God’s work in one another’s lives. Willard describes the expectation that God will speak from the Bible, “Our prayer as we study meditatively is always that God would meet with us and speak specifically to us, for ultimately the Word of God is God speaking” (Willard, *Spirit* 177). I believe that this formational reading approach to the Scriptures was a key part of what made Kaibigan successful. Formational reading is designed to lead one into an “intimate encounter” with God (Barton 47, 54).

Limitations

The project population for my research study came from a volunteer convenience sample. When convenience samples are used, it is hard to know whether they reflect the population (Best 473). In my case, all of the volunteers were field missionaries from one missionary organization. Except for one Korean-American, none of the participants were from Asia. A larger sample group, from different organizations and more diverse culturally, may have produced different results. The group focused exclusively on sharing what was learned through the formational reading of Scripture and so likely different results would be gained if a study approach was used or one in which more body life activities occurred.

Unexpected Observations

I was surprised by a number of things that happened during the Kaibigan blog.

Intense Nature of the Project

I was both delighted and surprised by the intense nature of the project. I suggested members be prepared to spend twenty minutes per day, but I think most found this figure

to be inadequate. Although I did not require participants read the daily passages and make a minimum number of comments each week, I had a high participation rate (almost nine comments made daily and most weeks, fourteen out of the fifteen participants making at least one comment). With the exception of Saturday and Sunday, I asked the group to read the daily Psalm as well as another selected passage. For the weekends, I gave the participants one reading (generally a longer passage) in addition to the Psalm for the week. In order to read and meditate over the passages, make a comment, read and perhaps make a reply to the comment of others required a significant amount of time. One participant wrote, “I found that if I was taking the whole thing seriously, it really did take up a lot of my time to read the comments of others and reflect on them. For me it turned out to be a bit of a mixed blessing.” While I did not formally study how much time people spent on the project, I heard from some participants that they needed between forty-five minutes and one hour daily. Lai’s discovered in his survey of tentmaker missionaries that people needed forty-five minutes in Bible reading in order for their reading to have an impact on their effectiveness (132).

I discovered the challenge of being both the facilitator and a participant (as did Lyke 121). I did not want to overly influence the group and bias my data but I believe that I needed to be a co-participant in order to make this a peer-based group. Lyke mentions the need for a facilitator support system as his online group developed and became more personal: “The result was that I began to feel the weight of the challenges the students were facing. I had underestimated the demand that regularly sharing a computer mediated space with 20 some persons would have on me” (125). In order for me and others in the group to have more support I recruited one person outside of our

organization to pray for each member of the blog and myself. I sent this group of *prayers* our weekly passages and asked each one to pray for the screen name of one member of the Kaibigan blog. I believe this group of fourteen people praying was a great support to me and to others in Kaibigan and a key reason for its success.

Enthusiasm of the Participants

The enthusiasm of the participants made it a joy to facilitate the Kaibigan blog. Group members sincerely wanted to hear God speak from his word and were willing to share honestly what they were learning with others. Because of poor Internet connection, at least two of the participants struggled to participate on a regular basis. In response to a question about what they found challenging during the Kaibigan blog, one person responded, “My greatest challenge was my disappointment in myself for not being able to keep up. I felt that inside of three weeks I had given very little to the group and this hurt me.” Most members of Kaibigan experienced a high level of loyalty to the group and wanted to care for one another.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the safety of the virtual community was a crucial element in Kaibigan. Another wrote, “One other benefit was that it was a safe place where I could ask difficult questions.” People seemed to truly enjoy being together with others in the reading of Scriptures, “It was nice to do things together, responding to each other and encouraging each other.” One member commented, “Sometimes I felt a passage was not really speaking to me. However, when I read the comments of others, I learned from them and the passage came alive.” People grew in their relationship with God, “The result was a closer relationship with God, more joy despite a heavy workload and a general feeling of being encouraged.” One person who did not feel very confident

with computers declared one benefit was, “That I could do this. I could take the time to do this. I did have the discipline to do this. I could share with people—that I couldn’t even see or didn’t even know their real names.” Technology did not detract from the formation of community.

I knew the Kaibigan blog was working when people indicated disappointment or sadness that the project was ending. Several people indicated a desire to be involved in another group in the future. At least one person went back through the passages on their own after Kaibigan finished. One individual re-created the blog because she “wanted to somehow continue it, ‘re-live it,’ and/or keep on doing it”

I had saved all my postings on your Kaibigan blog; and right when your Kaibigan was ending, I asked 8 of my close friends in this world ... if I could send, one posting a week to them, to “re-live” this Kaibigan blog. So for the last 11 1/2 weeks, I have been doing this. The 12 weeks (one week I sent the Psalm posting, the next week, the other posting for that week) will end this Saturday, Jan 1 of the new year. So! Some have really enjoyed it, and want me to keep on.... So! I just wanted to let you know that your Kaibigan has continued in my life. Your Kaibigan has influenced me and my 8 friends, and many of them are enjoying it; and I have been encouraged again, by what the Lord said to me during those 6 weeks last fall. Thanks.

How grateful I am for God being faithful to speak to his children from his word as they listen to him.

Problem of Let-Down at the End of the Project

I should have prepared better for the end of the project. Because of the enthusiastic participation in the Kaibigan blog, several participants (including myself) felt a let-down following the conclusion of Kaibigan. Possible reasons may have been unfinished business, a feeling of the loss of community or relief from the termination of such an intense period of time. Because of a busy travel schedule, I was unable to stay in

touch with all the participants immediately after the project. Follow-up care and debriefing should have been done, perhaps in a face-to-face post-group celebration for those interested.

Anonymity Questioned

The literature indicates online communities desire to have some knowledge about the other participants. I chose to keep Kaibigan anonymous. Many of the participants were from the same organization and knew each other and so I felt that promised anonymity would encourage participation and safe sharing. I also asked members to not copy and pass on to others comments from group members. User names identified members of Kaibigan in their posts and comments. Some members of Kaibigan suggested each person have a picture (real or representative) next to their name. Others wanted to meet face-to-face following the conclusion of Kaibigan. Perhaps this reveals that the essence of community is the desire for self-disclosure and a desire to be known. Anonymity may actually have prevented community from being formed for some members. I received requests from various members wanting to contact others in Kaibigan and when permission was given, I shared email addresses with both parties. In future blogs, I would use pictures, real names and allow each person to set up an *About* section in which they could describe a little about themselves (see Appendix J).

Recommendations

I hope that others will find my research using a blog to provide missionary member care an encouragement to find creative ways in caring for missionaries.

Suggestions to Others Wanting to Implement a Similar Program

I believe that the Kaibigan blog was a success. I offer a number of recommendations should others wish to try such a project.

First, unless security is a problem, I would advise that people's true identities be used. I would still, however, make the blog closed so that people would feel safe in sharing.

Second, guidelines for the project should be given at the beginning of the blog. I sent members a copy of the Kaibigan Essentials, a summary of the guidelines of the project, and requested that all agree to the Kaibigan Essentials before the blog began (see Appendix F). I clarified in this document the following purpose:

We will all be reading the same Scripture passages each day and sharing with each other, on a closed blog, how God is speaking to us from the Word. This is neither a Bible study group nor a hermeneutics discussion.

I explained to the group that we would be focused on personal, formational reading of the Bible rather than a fact-based, informational reading approach. Some participants believed that I should have explained more clearly the reading approach and the personal nature of the blog before people committed to join the project. I also should have communicated the theme of the week to the group so all members of the group knew why we were reading the passages we did.

Third, the blog needs a facilitator that is enforcing guidelines. For a sense of community and a shared intimacy to develop, groups "must know what they can expect from each other ... and have a way to process information and make decisions. Without this capacity the community will eventually perish" (McMillan 318). Facilitators should allow a minimum of ten hours a week to keep the blog running and engage adequately

with the participants. In order to maintain the peer nature of the blog, the facilitator should be a co-participant.

Fourth, researchers should consider carefully the number of daily Bible readings. One member who duplicated the Kaibigan blog took twelve weeks (instead of six weeks) to read the same passages. Another member suggested a way to reduce the time commitment:

Maybe I would enjoy 3 readings a week plus a Psalm to cover the week like an umbrella. One needs to be careful not to be too loose and easy-going. Then it might happen that the blog collapses because most people are busy.

One member complained about jumping from one passage to the next each day without any seeming theme or purpose. Presumably, he would have wanted the group to read through a book of the Bible so that contextual questions would not keep coming up.

Whatever approach is taken, the facilitator must clarify such an approach before members commit to the blog.

Because of the intense nature of such a blog, reflection is needed on how to limit the time commitment required for participation as well as in the number of participants. I am not sure Kaibigan could have been sustained its participation levels had it gone much beyond six weeks. Lyke suggests an initial six-week commitment, followed by a one-week break and then another six weeks (123), which would fit in an academic semester. Perhaps, when a new group is first being formed, it might be wise to read only one passage each day for a longer period of time in order to develop the *sense of community* fully. By reducing the daily readings, the time in the blog might be extended. On the other hand, a reduction in daily readings and comments may also prevent the *critical mass* needed to achieve and sustain a virtual community. When the blog is extended

beyond six weeks, the group should consider scheduling breaks to relieve the group from their commitment.

Kaibigan had fifteen participants and daily comments from each person would likely have been too overwhelming and time consuming for everyone. Nine to twelve members may be the ideal group size in order to sustain the blog and achieve the *critical mass* needed to sustain a group (Sparks 63; Lyke 122).

Fifth, because a blog cannot take place apart from an Internet connection, members must have a consistent and relatively fast connection. Even though I did make use of pictures for meditation on the Bible, Kaibigan was mostly a text blog and so did not require a high-speed modem. At least four of the fifteen participants used some form of a dial-up modem to access Kaibigan. In order to familiarize members with how a blog worked, I made a number of posts in the week before Kaibigan started and encouraged members to practice making comments (Lyke; Feng, Lazar, and Preece 105). I also posted a number of help pages on Kaibigan, explaining how to make a post, how to make a comment, and how to subscribe using an RSS feed (Sparks 23; Scheuerman 89-94; Wang and Hsua 84-5).

Train Group Facilitators

A peer-based online spiritual mentoring group requires a trained facilitator. A group facilitator is critical if a group is to be sustainable and develop a sense of community. Since I have suggested that such groups be limited in size, a process is needed to recruit and train facilitators so that more groups could be formed. Lyke suggests that every potential facilitator should have personally experienced one as a member. Since the facilitator would be responsible to make the daily Scripture posts,

facilitators may find it easier to follow a reading schedule such as a lectionary. Hallowell is developing a series of quiet time guides for new missionaries that may be a promising tool in the future.

Longitudinal Studies Needed on Missionary Spiritual Well-Being

The literature reveals few empirical studies on missionary spirituality (Hallowell; Hall, Edwards and Hall). I hope the present study once again raises awareness of the need, and in the future, researchers will attempt longitudinal studies on the spirituality of missionaries. Research conducted on the spiritual well-being of missionaries over the course of their first term would be most valuable. Complicating a project based on first-term missionaries is the fact that the traditional four-year term for missionaries seems to have become the exception rather than the rule.

In order to improve any future research further using a mixed-methods triangulation approach, I would recommend a team approach to the data analysis. When multiple individuals are involved in coding the data, confidence increases in the validity of the themes discovered out of the data (Bernard and Ryan 301).

A New Definition of Spiritual Well-Being

I have proposed that spiritual well-being is the degree to which a person has a positive awareness of and relationship experience with God in daily life rather than a subjective feeling of the transcendent. Spiritual wellness involves the ability to maintain a consistent emotional connection with God in the midst of the struggles of life. This definition comes out of research on measuring spiritual maturity done by Hall and Edwards and is based on an understanding of Christian spirituality, a spirituality in which a transformation takes place as a person “follows the way of Jesus” (Benner, *Opening to*

God 59). In this understanding, spiritual well-being mirrors the relational and emotional development of a person. I suggest that this definition of spiritual well-being is to be preferred over a purely subjective sense of God. More study needs to be done to determine the relationship between spiritual well-being and spiritual maturity.

Responsibilities for Missionary Spiritual Care

I propose missionary spiritual care be a core part of missionary member care. God is ultimately responsible for the pastoral care of missionaries, but mission organizations and individuals have a necessary role. Following a model developed by O'Donnell, David Williams makes the following comments about the spiritual care of missionaries:

As an organization, we should expect our missionaries to receive pastoral care from many sources, not just from us.... [I]t has reminded us that we cannot control every eventuality that our missionaries might face, but we have a Father in Heaven who can.

These words should encourage any of us responsible for the member care of missionaries.

Williams suggests six levels of care. All Christians need the first three levels:

Master care is God's care for his children, the affirmation that God cares for his flock and that pastoral care is his responsibility. Self care is the care of every Christian person for him or herself and his or her family, the responsibility each of us has for our own spiritual lives. Mutual care is the care Christians receive from the local congregation of believers that scripture expects us to meet with regularly.

Missionaries uniquely need the final three levels of care. Missionaries need "sender care," which is the care offered by the missionary organization and the sending churches of the missionary. "Specialist care" is done by outside groups and "network care" involves learning from international member care networks (Williams). Williams' group (CMS-Australia) as an organization works with its missionaries to develop a personal pastoral care plan in which missionaries are responsible to describe their pastoral care

needs (see Appendix L). Presumably, after this plan is made, it is communicated to the mission organization and to the sending churches of the missionaries.

God is ultimately responsible for the care of his flock but missionary organizations and sending churches should not neglect the responsibility to care spiritually for missionaries that are sent out (Williams). Missionary organizations who train members to be involved in peer member care such as in the peer-based online spiritual mentoring model that I have presented will move away from reliance on mental health professionals and ultimately have more effective missionaries.

Postscript

Although, I am very glad to be at the end of this project, I realize that much still needs to be done in the area of missionary spiritual care.

Although I have highlighted the need for missionary spiritual care, I do not intend to communicate that missionaries are any more needy than other Christians in this area. Because of their unique calling and lifestyle, missionaries do have special needs, and too often churches and organizations make assumptions about the spiritual lives of missionaries that are simply not true. I have been impressed by the deep levels of spirituality of many of my missionary colleagues over the course of almost twenty-five years as a missionary.

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Age:

Gender:

Marital status:

Length of service:

Location (rural, town, city, mega-city):

Type of ministry:

Describe the type of fellowship opportunities you have each week with other missionaries or local believers.

What kind of spiritual or emotional support do you get from your local or home church?

Describe briefly any previous experiences you have had with mentoring, spiritual mentoring, or spiritual direction?

Describe your devotional habits.

What kind of spiritual support would be most helpful to you?

How many hours do you typically spend on the Internet each day?

How reliable is your Internet connection?

APPENDIX B
PARTNERSHIP SECONDMENT AGREEMENT

September 1, 2009
between FEBIAS College of the Bible, Valenzuela, Metro Manila
and
O International PH

BACKGROUND

1. **L and A** are members of O and will be the seconded
2. **FEBIAS College of the Bible (FEBIAS, hereafter)** has requested OMF Philippines to second **L and A** to a teaching ministry at **FEBIAS**.
3. **O PH**, on behalf of O Intl., (jointly and severally referred to as **O**) enters into this agreement with **FEBIAS**.

TERMS

1. This Agreement shall be for the period 1 October 2009 to 31 October 2010 subject to the provisions below. This agreement may be renewed for an additional year with the agreement of all parties.
2. **L and A**
 - 2.1 Will abide by the vision, mission and core values of O PH and O International.
 - 2.2 Will be accountable to the Personnel Resource Manager of O Philippines who have been appointed to oversee the care provided by O during their ministry at **FEBIAS**.
 - 2.3 Commit to conduct their life in accordance with Biblical standards. They will refrain from any misconduct that will jeopardize the name of Christ and/or the ministry in any way.
 - 2.4 Will be accountable to the **FEBIAS** administration for teaching assignments and will abide by the **FEBIAS** faculty code of conduct.
 - 2.5 Will abide by the security regulations and contingency plans of O PH.
3. **O** shall provide **L and A**
 - 3.1. Fellowship services in accordance with O's policies and practices, including but not limited to:
 - 3.1.1. Annual medical check-ups, medical insurance and ongoing care of their medical needs
 - 3.1.2. Member care through regular meetings at O and on site visits.
 - 3.1.3. Annual vacations.
 - 3.1.4. Home Assignment, accumulating 3 months for every one year of service, variable by and taken with prior agreement with **FEBIAS**.
 - 3.2. Access to O Philippines field workers' meetings and conferences, pastoral care and services of O PH.

4. **FEBIAS shall:-**
 - 4.1. Provide **L and A** with a Job Description (to be attached to this document as an appendix) and with **FEBIAS** job-related supervision and pastoral care.
 - 4.2. Assist in registration with the barangay for visa approval purposes.
 - 4.3. Provide rent-free accommodation on campus. Should **L and A** choose, they may decide to live off-campus.
 - 4.4. Provide assistance with **FEBIAS** ministry expenses.
5. Extension & Termination
 - 5.1. **Extension**
This agreement may be extended by mutual agreement upon either party giving the other 3 months' written notice prior to its expiry.
 - 5.2. **Termination**
Either party may terminate this agreement by 3 months' prior notice in writing.
 - 5.3. **Variation**
Minor variations of no more than three months' extension or earlier termination, or of home assignment or annual vacation may be made by mutual agreement.
6. Interpretation
 - 6.1. Except by prior agreement, where O's Policies and Practices are inconsistent with **FEBIAS** standard Terms & Conditions of Employment or **L and A** Job Description, O's Policies and Practices shall apply.
 - 6.2. **L and A** shall be considered an employee of **FEBIAS** but they shall remain members of O Philippines and are expected to participate in O's Philippines Field activities (weekly prayer meetings, monthly field workers meetings, annual field conferences) by prior arrangement with **FEBIAS**.
 - 6.3. In the event of a difference of opinion regarding the interpretation of this agreement or any of its terms, **FEBIAS** and O will use their best endeavours to resolve such differences amicably without resort to any legal or judicial process.

Signed by the following:

L and A

O Philippines

FEBIAS

Date:

Date:

Date:

APPENDIX C

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Week 1

Theme: Strength, stability and the Word

Psalm for the week: Ps. 1

Monday: Heb. 12:1-2

Tuesday: Matt. 6:25-34

Wednesday: Gal. 6:1-10

Thursday: Mark 10:17-31

Friday: Josh.:1-9

Saturday/Sunday: Exod. 3:1-4:17

Week 2

Theme: Trust, fear, enemies/opposition

Psalm for the week: Ps. 56

Monday: 2 Cor. 4:16-18

Tuesday: 1 Pet. 2:21-25

Wednesday: Luke 6:6-11

Thursday: Mark 2:13-17

Friday: Gen. 50:15-21

Saturday/Sunday: John 9:1-41

Week 3

Theme: Refuge and the goodness of God

Psalm for the week: Ps. 16

Monday: John 17:20-26

Tuesday: 1 John 2:28-32

Wednesday: Heb. 2:1-13

Thursday: 2 Sam. 6:16-23

Friday: Mark 10:46-52

Saturday/Sunday: Luke 7:36-50

Week 4

Theme: Intimate journey with God as shepherd

Psalm for the week: Ps. 23

Monday: Heb. 13:20-21

Tuesday: John 10:7-18

Wednesday: 1 Pet. 5:1-10

Thursday: Rev. 7:13-17

Friday: Isa. 40:9-31

Saturday/Sunday: Luke 15:11-32

Week 5

Theme: Sin and forgiveness

Psalm for the week: Ps. 103

Monday: Gen. 3:1-13

Tuesday: Ps. 51

Wednesday: Matt. 21: 28-32

Thursday: 1 John 1:5-9

Friday: Matt. 5:1-11

Saturday/Sunday: Isa. 53

Week 6

Theme: God as helper, keeper, protector, stability

Psalm for the week: Ps. 121

Monday: John 15:1-11

Tuesday: 2 Cor. 1:3-11

Wednesday: Zeph. 3:14-20

Thursday: Psa. 126

Friday: 1 Pet. 1:3-9

Saturday/Sunday: Matt. 14:22-33

APPENDIX D

FORMATIONAL READING

Why we need the Bible if we are serious about spirituality.

- “The Christian Scriptures are the primary text for Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by the scriptural text” (Peterson 186).
- “Christians feed on Scripture. Holy Scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body. Christians don’t simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus’ name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in company with the Son” (Peterson 230).
- Without the Bible “We will sink into a swamp of well-meaning but ineffectual men and women who are mired unmercifully in our needs and wants and feelings” (Peterson 424).

What is Spiritual or Formational Reading?

- “In our reading of this book we come to realize that what we need is not primarily informational, telling us about God and ourselves, but formational, shaping us into our true being” (Peterson 284).
- Eugene H. Peterson says, “*Spirit*-sourced writing requires spiritual reading, a reading that honors words as holy.” What then is spiritual reading? *Lectio divina* or spiritual reading is “reading that enters our souls as food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and wisdom” (Peterson 99).
- “Reading is an immense gift, but only if the words are assimilated, taken into the soul—eaten, chewed, gnawed, received in unhurried delight.” (Peterson 176; Rev. 10:9-10).
- “Our prayer as we study meditatively is always that God would meet with us and speak specifically to us, for ultimately the Word of God is God speaking” (Willard, *Spirit* 177).
- Too often Bible reading is an intellectual activity only. “Meditation stimulates our thinking and moves the will” (Johnson 95).
- “We need a way of approaching Scripture that will move us very concretely from our overreliance on information gathering to an experience of Scripture as a place of intimate encounter.” (Barton 54)
- “Slower more reflective reading of Scripture that helps us to be open to God’s initiative rather than being subject to human agendas—our own or someone else’s” (Barton 55).
- “We read slowly so that we can savor each word and let its meaning sink in.... [W]e stay in the place where God is speaking to us, contemplating its meaning for our life and for our relationship” (Barton 50).

- “As God speaks to us through Scripture, we respond to what we read with our heart and soul rather than just our intellect” (Barton 51).
- “When we read, we pay attention to our own inner dynamics” (Barton 51)
 1. How do I feel about what is being said?
 2. Where do I feel myself resonating?
 3. Where do I find myself resisting, pulling back, wrestling with what Scripture might be saying?
 4. Why do I feel this way? What aspect of my life or my inner being is being touched or spoken to through this Scripture?
 5. What do my reactions tell me about myself—my attitudes, my relating patterns, my perspectives, my behaviors? Am I willing to look at them in God’s presence?

The Problem of Informational Reading Alone

- We have “fallen into a pattern of using the Scriptures as a tool to accomplish utilitarian purposes rather than experiencing them primarily as a place of intimacy with God for my own soul’s sake” (Barton 47).
- “My mind remained engaged, but my heart and soul had drifted far away”
- “Our emphasis is primarily on mastery, that is, controlling the text for our own ends—gathering information, interpreting or applying the information, proving our point about something, gaining a ministry tool or solving a problem” (Barton 49).

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

I am exploring the possible benefits on missionaries' spiritual well-being of participation in an online spiritual reading group. This research project enables me to fulfill the requirements for my doctor of ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Your participation will consist of the following:

1. Completing the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) both before and after the project. The SAI consists of 54 questions measuring spiritual wellness in two dimensions, awareness of God and quality of relationship with God. At the beginning of the SAI, you will be asked to answer a few demographic questions about yourself. I will be sending you a link where you can access the SAI once I receive your electronic response and approval of the participation agreement.

Analysis of your responses on the SAI will be presented as numerical data in the dissertation but no names will be used at any time. Your identity in the project will be protected and known only by myself. Following the conclusion of the project, a simple analysis of your personal responses will be provided upon request.

2. Following the SAI pre-test, each of you will select an anonymous user name and be given a password to access the Kaibigan blog at <http://kaibiganblog.org/>

Each day during the project, as group facilitator, I will assign passages that the group will be reading. As a participant, you are encouraged to make comments at any time about the passages following your reflection on the passages. These comments will be made on kaibiganblog.org, a website that is visible only to members of this group. All members of the group will be able to see one another's comments. More information about making comments will be given in a later document. Following conclusion of the project, all comments will be removed from the website.

3. At the conclusion of each week, I will send you an email, prompting you to answer one question regarding what you are learning about God.

It would be helpful to me if you would please acknowledge your understanding of the nature of this project, your willingness to participate and your permission to use the data collected in my dissertation.

Please consider the following statements before replying. Your electronic reply is sufficient to affirm that you are in agreement with them.

- I understand that I am participating in a research project.
- I understand that only the project facilitator will be able to link my data with my identity and that all information identifying me will be destroyed following the end of the study.
- I understand that participation in the research is not required, is voluntary, and that, after the research project has begun, I may withdraw at any time.

If you have any further questions regarding this research or your participation in it at any time, you may contact my dissertation mentor, Dr. Leslie Andrews at leslie.andrews@asburyseminary.edu or at 1-859-858-3581.

APPENDIX F

KAIBIGAN BLOG ESSENTIALS

1. Summary
We will all be reading the same Scripture passages each day and sharing with each other, on a closed blog, how God is speaking to us from the Word. This is neither a Bible study group nor a hermeneutics discussion.
2. Premises
God speaks to us from his word in the context of community. God desires that each of us experience transformation. Our transformation into the image of Christ is dependent upon the Spirit of God working the Word of God into our daily life. We respect and honor the process and the timing in which God is at work in each person's life.
3. What is important
 - a. Honesty—We share honestly which words, phrases or verses God is speaking to you. If there is silence, that is okay. But we still read and share in the silence together.
 - b. Respect—Our purpose is to encourage and support one another. So, we will not criticize others or ask them to prove or justify something. Above all, we honor what God is doing in our brother or sister.
 - c. Safety—As a closed blog, this blog is open only to people with the blog password. In order to develop a level of trust and confidentiality, each of us commits to not share outside of the blog any comments or statements made in the blog. In order to make this easier, we will have a user name and not use our real names. That does not mean that we don't share personal things about ourselves with the group. But, what we share is entirely up to each one.
 - d. Humility—we agree that we are all equal before the cross. We are like Samuel in the temple, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." We admit that we do not know everything. We position ourselves as learners. We admit that the discipline of daily Bible reading is hard and that we need accountability for what we are learning from our reading. Part of this process is letting go of control—we read a passage someone else has selected for us and trust God to speak through his word and the community around us.
 - e. Personal Experience We will not be reading commentaries or Bible notes about the passages we are reading—just the words of the text. We can get help from one another or from an outside source if there are words we don't understand or cultural points that make the meaning of the passage unclear. But there will generally be no need to share our study insights.
4. Our commitments
 - a. We will each do our best to read and meditate on the Bible passages selected by the group moderator each day. How much time you spend is up to each individual
 - b. We will access the blog daily as much as is possible and make comments (responses to the post of the day) as we have something to contribute. As the project goes on, others may want to make new posts (statement originating

- from you)
- c. We commit to honesty, respect, safety and humility as outlined in 3.

APPENDIX G

WELCOME AND SUGGESTIONS

I deeply appreciate all of you joining in our kaibigan blog reading group.

Kaibigan means friend in Tagalog for those who were wondering. I trust that this will be an encouraging and safe place in your journey with the Lord. A few suggestions

1. If you ever get lost, click on home or visit site and that will take you back to the main page.

2. If your time allows, we are reading the Psalm for the week each day and then another passage. Read these for your own soul and only share with the group what you are comfortable sharing. When I read, I read each passage a number of times and I use a combination of writing, praying and reflecting to meditate on the passage. Check out the page on “spiritual reading” if you want to understand more about this.

3. To post or to comment? Most of the time you will be making a comment on other posts. I think it makes more sense to keep all the comments on any one passage together and so if you were reading Psalm 131, then you would make a comment under the Psalm 131 post for the week. If you were making a comment on the day’s passage (Ezekiel), then make the comment under the Ezekiel passage. Feel free to start a new post if you want to bring up a new topic not directly related to the passage for the day.

4. Don’t feel under any pressure or compulsion to post or comment. This is a new thing for all of us and my theory is that in sharing how we are individually meeting with God, we will be encouraging others. I have found that as I read the same Psalm every day for a week, I get new insights each day so I might make comments on the Psalm three, four or five times in a week.

Enough for now

APPENDIX H

HOW TO MAKE A COMMENT

After reading the Psalm for the week, you may want to share how God has been speaking to you with the group. To make a comment, click on comment under the post in question.

Under the word Reply, there is a box where you put your comments. When you are done, click on the submit button. You will be able to edit this later if needed.

If you want to make another comment on the same passage (as is likely in the Psalm for the week), it is best to make a new comment rather than adding to your old comment. Everyone will be notified each time there is a new comment or a new post.

APPENDIX I

HOW TO MAKE A POST

Click [here](#) if you want to make a new post. A post consists of a title and content that you have created. Comments are replies that you have made to other people's posts.

In the Dashboard area, you can click on New Post or you can fill in the information on Quick Post. After you have filled in the title and the content, you can either save it as a draft or publish it. If you publish your post, it will show up on the blog. If you save it as a draft, it will sit there until you edit your draft post and click on publish.

Even if you have published a post, you may edit your post. To edit, you will need to go into the dashboard section again, click on posts and then edit the draft post you have made. You shouldn't be able to edit other people's posts. Be sure to click UPDATE in order to save your edit if you are not ready to publish OR click publish to have your post appear on the blog front page.

If you want to delete your post, you can do this under edit posts as well.

Hope this is helpful.

APPENDIX J

ABOUT

Thank you for volunteering to join in the project phase for my dissertation at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am praying that God will use this to encourage all of us in our journey with the Lord Jesus. If at anytime you are concerned about the project, you may e-mail my mentor, Dr. Leslie Andrews.

APPENDIX K

WEEK 6 QUESTIONS

Thank you for participating in the Kaibigan blog. May I ask you a few final questions and request that you click on the link below to take the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) once again?

1. How has your awareness of God and the quality of your relationship with God changed (if any) over the last week? Over the last six weeks?
2. In your opinion, what are the most important benefits of participation in an online spiritual reading group as we did in the kaibigan blog? (general process question)
3. What were your major insights or discoveries during kaibigan?
4. What surprised or challenged you (if anything) about participation in kaibigan?
5. Is there anything that you should have known before the project began?
6. What should be explained to someone before participating in a future spiritual reading group?
7. How could kaibigan be changed to more fully engage participants?
8. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

APPENDIX L

CMS-AUSTRALIA INTEGRATED PASTORAL CARE PLAN TEMPLATE

Introduction:

This document outlines the pastoral care plan for _____, as agreed between _____ and CMS-Australia. This plan will form the basis of pastoral care planning and provision for _____ and his family, in conjunction with *(name of spouse)*'s pastoral care plan. The plan follows the structure of CMS's model for pastoral care of missionaries, which is illustrated below:

Time Frame:

This Pastoral Care Plan is written for the period from _____ to _____. It therefore covers the last _____ months of current home assignment, _____ years of field assignment and the first _____ month's of the next home assignment. A new Pastoral Care Plan will be written half way through the next home assignment.

1. Master Care:

1.1. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd of His sheep. We entrust _____ and his family to the care of the Master Shepherd, confident of our Lord's loving kindness, covenant faithfulness and sovereign rule over all our lives.

2. Self Care:

2.1. We believe that individual Christians are responsible for their own spiritual growth and maturity. _____ will therefore continue to practice habits and disciplines that ensure that he is hearing God's word and growing in prayerful faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. Specifically _____ will:

2.1.1. (Insert details of intended devotional habits and disciplines; consider areas

of personal godliness that are being developed.)

2.2. As a husband and father, _____ will practice habits and disciplines with his family to help them to grow together in their love for the Lord Jesus. Specifically _____ will:

2.2.1. (Insert details of intended family and marriage devotional habits and disciplines)

2.3. CMS will encourage _____ to be faithful with these disciplines (see Section 4.X)

3. Mutual Care:

3.1. We believe that God lovingly provides us with other Christians who encourage us to go on trusting the Lord Jesus. CMS missionaries will, wherever possible, receive pastoral care and encouragement in their local situation.

3.2. (Insert plans for local church involvement on field location, including Sunday church attendance, small group bible study and prayer support. Consider personal witness to those who are not Christians).

3.3. (Insert significant pastoral links with churches in Australia that will be focus of mutual care).

3.4. (Insert plans for prayer updates and prayer letters).

3.5. CMS will encourage _____ to be faithful with these disciplines (see Section 4.X)

4. Sender Care:

4.1. CMS-Australia takes its responsibility as a sending agency seriously and seeks to serve _____ in the areas of care listed below. In each of these areas CMS will either provide adequate care or will seek specialist assistance in order to provide care in these areas (see Section 5)

- 4.1.1. Pastoral/spiritual
- 4.1.2. Physical/medical
- 4.1.3. Training/career
- 4.1.4. Team building
- 4.1.5. Family/Children
- 4.1.6. Financial/logistical
- 4.1.7. Crisis/contingency
- 4.1.8. Counseling/psychological

4.2. CMS has outlined its provision of pastoral care in these areas in general terms in “Guidelines for Missionaries.” We note the following specific provisions for _____:

- 4.2.1. (Outline details of commissioning).*
- 4.2.2. (Outline plans for Pastoral Visits).*
- 4.2.3. (Outline arrangements for “Pastoral Friend”).*
- 4.2.4. (Outline any other arrangements specific to _____).*

5. Specialist Care:

5.1. CMS seeks specialist assistance in pastoral care in some situations. These are outlined in general terms in “Guidelines for Missionaries.” However, we note the following specific provisions for _____:

- 5.1.1. (Outline any other arrangements specific to _____).*

6. Network Care:

6.1. CMS has put in place structures that will help us to listen to networks of specialist care for missionaries and to listen to and contribute to those networks.

6.2. CMS commits to _____ and his family to keep on reviewing our provision of pastoral care against network models of best practice, in order to provide the best pastoral care possible for our missionaries.

APPENDIX M

SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY (version 7)

Todd W. Hall, Ph.D.

Keith J. Edwards, Ph.D.

Instructions

1. Please respond to each statement below by writing the number that best represents your experience in the box to the right of the statement.
2. It is best to answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.
3. Give the answer that comes to mind first. Don't spend too much time thinking about an item.
4. Give the best possible response to each statement even if it does not provide all the information you would like.
5. Try your best to respond to all statements. Your answers will be completely confidential.
6. Some of the statements consist of two parts as shown here:

2.1 There are times when I feel disappointed with God.

2.2 When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue.

Your response to 2.2 tells how true statement 2.2 is for you when you have the experience of feeling disappointed with God described in statement 2.1.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at True	Slightly True	Moderately True	Substantially True	Very True

1	2	3	4	5
Not at True	Slightly True	Moderately True	Substantially True	Very True

1. I have a sense of how God is working in my life A
2. There are times when I feel disappointed with God D
 - 2.2 When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue RA
3. God's presence feels very real to me A
4. I am afraid that God will give up on me I
5. I seem to have a unique ability to influence God through my prayers G
6. Listening to God is an essential part of my life A
7. There are times when I feel frustrated with God D
 - 7.2 When I feel this way, I still desire to put effort into our relationship RA
8. I am aware of God prompting me to do things A
9. My emotional connection with God is unstable I
10. My experiences of God's responses to me impact me greatly A
11. There are times when I feel irritated at God D
 - 11.2 When I feel this way, I am able to come to some sense of resolution in our relationship RA
12. God recognizes that I am more spiritual than most people G
13. I am aware of God's presence in my interactions with other people A
14. There are times when I feel that God is punishing me I
15. I am aware of God responding to me in a variety of ways A
16. There are times when I feel angry at God D
 - 16.2 When this happens, I still have the sense that God will always be with me RA
17. I am aware of God attending to me in times of need A
18. God understands that my needs are more important than most people's G
19. I am aware of God telling me to do something A
20. I worry that I will be left out of God's plans I
21. My experiences of God's presence impacts me greatly A
22. I have a sense of the direction in which God is guiding me A
23. My relationship with God is an extraordinary one that most people would not understand. G
24. There are times when I feel betrayed by God D
 - 24.2 When I feel this way, I put effort into restoring our relationship RA
25. I am aware of God communicating to me in a variety of ways A
26. Manipulating God seems to be the best way to get what I want G

1	2	3	4	5
Not at True	Slightly True	Moderately True	Substantially True	Very True

27. I am aware of God's presence in times of need A
28. From day to day, I sense God being with me A
29. There are times when I feel frustrated by God for not responding to my prayers D
29.2 When I feel this way, I am able to talk it through with God RA
30. I have a sense of God communicating guidance to me A
31. When I sin, I tend to withdraw from God I
32. I experience an awareness of God speaking to me personally A
33. I find my prayers to God are more effective than other people's
34. I feel I have to please God or he might reject me I
35. I have a strong impression of God's presence A
36. There are times when I feel that God is angry at me I
37. I am aware of God being very near to me A
38. When I sin, I am afraid of what God will do to me I
39. When I consult God about decisions in my life, I am aware of His direction and help A
40. I seem to be more gifted than most people in discerning God's will G
41. When I feel God is not protecting me, I tend to feel worthless I
42. There are times when I feel like God has let me down D
42.2 When this happens, my trust in God is not completely broken RA

Scales

A	=	Awareness
RA	=	Realistic Acceptance
D	=	Disappointment
G	=	Grandiosity
I	=	Instability

Scoring Instructions: The score for each scale is the average of answered items. If the respondent omits more than half the items for a given scale, the scale cannot be scored.

Scoring of the RA scale items (designated by xx.2 item numbers) depends on the respondent's answer to the corresponding disappointment item (designated by xx.1 item numbers). If the respondent answers "not at all true" (1) on the xx.1 item, then the corresponding xx.2 item is NOT included in the RA scale average score. For example, if he/she rates item 2.1 as a "1", then item 2.2 is not included in calculating the RA scale score average.

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