

ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: A DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

by

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Domestic abuse has risen to epidemic levels in the United States even among Christian women at the hands of their intimate partners. Many of these Christian women faithfully attend church services while silently holding their fears. Unfortunately, the Christian community has not intervened with supportive ministries to adequately address the spiritual growth of these suffering women. This study deals with assessing their spiritual growth following the intervention of a discipleship experience. Three principal factors were gleaned from a literature review to create an eight-week experience for spiritual transformation among Christian women who suffered abuse and lived in Orangeburg, SC.

The instrumentation used to assess the effectiveness of this multi-sensory discipleship approach to spiritual transformation were pre- and post-spiritual growth evaluation surveys, journal entries, and one focus-group session. Women who were eighteen years of age and over who suffered domestic abuse and lived in Orangeburg, SC were eligible to participate in this research. Of the applicants, five women were selected to participate. The researcher developed a discipleship manual that was intended to produce spiritual maturity. The eight-week discipleship experience took place at the Orangeburg County Public Library.

The findings indicated that the amalgamation of several key components is beneficial to the learning process. The key components are a worldview discovery of God's love for humanity, daily implementation of spiritual disciplines, and the espousal of small groups all of which helped strengthen the participants' relationship with God and others. Several lessons were realized from this study: First, Christian women are hesitant about sharing their stories of intimate partner violence. Second, the Holy Spirit impresses truth upon the hearts and minds of people who are open to receive from Him. Finally, establishing trust is paramount for enhanced learning, retention, and the application of spiritual principles.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:
A DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCE FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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by
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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter One provides the framework for investigating how a twelve-week spiritual direction experience impacted spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse. The researcher's autobiography gave entrance to the rationale for the project by reporting on firsthand experiences of domestic abuse. Thus, the autobiographical introduction provides a window into the detrimental effect of a weakened practice of spiritual disciplines in the life and ministry of Christian women who have suffered abuse and provided the rationale for this project. Chapter One continues with the research design, purpose statement, and research questions that guided the research project. The conclusion of Chapter One presents pertinent questions that directed the research, the identification of key themes for the literature review, and the research methodology.

Personal Introduction

My parents, James and Beatrice Davis, made sure my brother, sister, and I were raised in a home filled with laughter, food, and respect for God. The community we grew up in was friendly and close-knitted. Family values were based upon biblical principles and Bible verses were often quoted to support conversational points, particularly when it concerned disciplinary actions. Family and faith governed the forefront of our daily life as was typical in Black families. Our family prayed, read the Bible, attended worship services, and practiced Sabbath. I planned to go to college, become a physician, and

model my marriage after my parents. I wanted to have a happy family. However, as we became young teenagers, my father became extremely strict with my sister and me. To escape what seemed to be a suffocating situation, I got married in the eleventh grade. Everyone tried to talk me out of getting married, including my future mother-in-law however, I was determined.

The day of our wedding was the day domestic abuse began. I lied to my parents when they asked if he was hitting me. I was so ashamed and did not want to admit that I had made a terrible mistake. The toll of the domestic abuse I experienced was a loss of weight, sleepless nights, ulcers, and isolation. Meanwhile, my husband would be gone for days without ensuring that our three sons had sufficient food. I did not work because my husband feared that I would find someone else and leave him. I had stopped attending church, mainly because I did not have a way to get to church and if I left home and he found out, that would mean another fight.

After spending eight years in this abusive marriage, I found myself divorced with three young sons and no means of properly supporting us. I use the word “spending” because I began to think about the years I had given to this relationship. I was angry that I had become distracted from my goals. I was frustrated with myself for not heeding the warnings of family and close friends who knew that marriage was not the best choice for me at that time in my life. The feelings of being stuck in an unmanageable situation seemed eternal. My life was spinning in circles without direction.

My relationship with God was deteriorating rapidly and the Christian spiritual traditions I practiced growing up had diminished to a sobbing prayer for help. One day I decided to dress the kids and walk to a church close by. When I got to the door a white

usher opened the door, stood in the opening, and informed me that I was at the wrong church. He instructed me that the church I wanted was further up the street. As my sons and I descended the steps, they seemed higher than when we ascended them. Anger overtook my thought processes. I was continuing to make poor decisions. I refused to go to church and began finding comfort in activities with my sons, work, volunteering, dating, and drugs. Marijuana and cocaine were my weekend methods of relaxation.

On a weekend trip to Manhattan, New York, I went to the store where two men kidnapped and forced me into a car. They raped me and left me on the streets. I remember walking, crying, and praying to be back home in Baltimore, Maryland. By the grace of God, I found my way back to the house I left hours earlier. I did not realize it then, but God saved me because the men threatened to throw me into the Hudson River. God directed me back to the home I was visiting in a city I did not know. The devastation of this horrific event brought back vague memories of two childhood abusive occurrences with two male relatives who molested me.

Fortunately, it did not take long for me to realize that if I were to function, I needed mental and emotional healing, support, and financial assistance. Support from my parents, my sister, and a cousin who was like a surrogate mother was available. However, gathering the energy to confess what I was experiencing was difficult. I was too ashamed of looking like a failure. My need for emotional support is compounded with the many roles I served in—mother, employee, sister, friend, and volunteer in several community organizations. The responsibilities that accompanied these roles did not leave time for me. I knew I needed to deal with the inner hurt and anger I felt, but I did not know where to go or to whom to turn.

My sister helped me to find a local church for us to attend. A notice in the Sunday bulletin about an emotional healing session with a licensed counselor for women who had experienced abuse caught my attention. I signed up for it. Although I was hesitant, I knew deep down inside that this was an opportunity to find inner peace. When the time came for the first session, held at the church's women's center, I found myself sitting in my car outside—unable to enter because of fear. I was afraid of condemnation because, at that time, the judicial system did not support domestic abused women in their plight for justice. I was ashamed, confused, and afraid about what others might think about me, including the other women who would attend the counseling session. I sat in the car for a while, too nervous to enter. Eventually, I left because I knew that I could not push myself to get out of the car. Help was so close yet so far away.

When it was time for the second session, I had mentally prepared myself to get out of the car and go inside. I knew that attending this session was necessary not only for me but for my sons. The meeting place was comfortable with medium lighting which helped to relax me. Three other women were in attendance. We sat in a semi-circle facing the therapist. The tension I felt was vividly displayed in my facial expression because the therapist did not ask me to speak for a few minutes, other than to give my name. By the end of my first session, I was more comfortable and participated in the sessions that followed.

Finally, I had a breakthrough. To my surprise, I learned that I was angry with God because I blamed him for allowing those evil acts to happen to me. Thanks to a discipleship course at our church the process of spiritual transformation began. My erroneous thinking changed, and I remember sighing deeply as I released the negativity

bottled up inside. I found out that God cared about me and that he had a plan for my life. What I experienced was the joy of being set free from guilt, shame, anger, and unforgiveness, and, even forgiving myself. I experienced the love of God, and my life changed forever. It was not instantaneous total healing, but I understood that Jesus had come to set me, a captive, free. I experienced God's love! The result was a strengthening of my spiritual practices and my relationship with God.

Over the years, I have met Christian women who suffer from various measures of domestic abuse but did not have the emotional strength to seek help. Women are so afraid and ashamed that they suffer in silence afraid to disclose their experiences with mental abuse by societal traditions. Even biblical and theological beliefs and practices thought to be harmless can cause long-lasting mental distress. For example, comments such as, "You have to stay with him;" "Pray and trust God;" or even "Women can't do that" can cause anguish. Women suffer physically and emotionally from statements like these. Until women are healed from the inside out, they remain in bondage to their past and cannot live up to their maximum potential and fulfill their God-given purpose.

My belief rests on the hypothesis that the Christian community in Orangeburg, South Carolina has not adequately responded to the suffering of this population. Issues that negatively affect and impact the lives of women have been occurring for centuries. One example is how women could not vote until a joint resolution was passed by Congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920. The resolution was the result of a women's rights group formed by Alice Paul called the National Woman's Party. The church was supportive during this movement by offering meeting rooms. In like manner,

domestic abuse is another women's suffrage movement in which the Christian community in Orangeburg should be actively involved.

Are there endeavors to offer support and resources to the women in Orangeburg who suffered domestic abuse? My surmise is that this Christian community has not offered enough support to women who have suffered domestic abuse to help them break their silence and speak up. When my practice of the Christian traditions that I grew up with waned, I failed to thrive in every area of my life. This project was birthed from the realization that the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines is vital for spiritual transformation into the image of God.

Statement of the Problem

Women continue to suffer from domestic abuse in the United States at a shocking rate. The possibilities surrounding these high numbers remain startling. According to a report from the Division of Violence Prevention of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) identifies intimate partner violence as physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression and "one in five women will be raped and one in three women will experience some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime" (CDC; Smith et al. 4-5). The life-time prevalence of intimate partner violence is not only a reality for heterosexual women (35%), it is also a major concern for women who have partners of the same sex 43.8% of lesbians, and 61.1% of bisexual women (Rolle et al.). In the latter statistical information, the threat of disclosure remains the control factor of the abuser who expects their partner to submit to their abusive behavior.

Abuse comes in many facets, such as physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional. South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault reports that

femicide, in many cases, exceeds the national rate by more than twice the number (Domestic Violence). This pattern exists in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and has a devastating impact on the abused individuals and their families. South Carolina ranks sixth in the state for homicides caused by domestic violence as reported by the Domestic Abuse Center (Domestic Violence).

Within the community of Orangeburg, there is one shelter, Citizens Against Sexual Assault Family Systems (CASA). CASA receives more than one thousand calls each year. The calls come from women confronted with burdens and unrealistic expectations which are often self-imposed. Few churches in this community offer programs that can help women overcome the impact and effects of their domestic abuse. To address the lack of support for abused women, the Christian community must evaluate its stance on this issue and devise a program that offers to women biblically based support for spiritual direction.

To provide spiritual direction, both pastors and Christian leaders direct parishioners to the Bible for mapping harmonious relationships within their families and communities. Scripture does address the moral character believers are to demonstrate towards each other, particularly in the epistles of the apostle Paul (*King James Bible*, 1 Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:14-15, 23-29, 5:1-11; Heb. 12:3-6; Jas. 1-5). Wendell Willis believed that the moral characteristics of believers, particularly in the church in Corinth, led to Paul's epistle to them concerning Christian ethics (1 Cor. 1, 3). Scripture also supports the fair and equitable treatment of women (John 8:1-11; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:1-33; Rom. 1:1-32, 16:1, 7, 23, 3:23). However, transformational intervention often comes from a patriarchal perspective (Gen. 16:6; Num. 20:15; Matt. 22:6; 1 Tim. 2:8-15). Throughout

the Bible and even in today's society, the majority of governmental decision-makers are male. There are instances where women have made significant inroads in the transformational policy-formulating stages in the private and public sectors. Judge Deborah is one example from the past of a woman who functioned in a decision-making role (Judg. 4, 5). In modern society, women have made great progress in obtaining leadership positions. Irrespective of the fact that men still dominate top leadership decision-making positions the love of God, as shown throughout Scripture, can bring healing to hurting women. Sarah had no decision-making power when Abraham lied stating that Sarah was his sister (Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1-13). Still, God intervened and saved Sarah from unwarranted duress.

The grace of God was extended to Sarah in a time of need. Sarah's experience is not an isolated occurrence even in modern society. The Christian community in Orangeburg has an opportunity to partake in the salvatory plan of God. It can become intentional about providing spiritual direction to women who suffered domestic abuse through support and training that leads to spiritual transformation.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who have suffered domestic abuse and attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

Research Questions

The research involved the development of a group of qualitative questions to assess the effectiveness of the project as related to each participant's spiritual

transformation before and after the eight-week experience of spiritual direction. Each participant suffered domestic abuse by an intimate partner. These wounded women who have suffered in silence can experience God's transformative healing power through contemplative living. The following research questions provided the basis for the assessment of this project.

Research Question #1

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, were identified before the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Research Question #2

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified following the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Research Question #3

What aspect of the -week experience of spiritual direction had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Rationale for the Project

This study matters primarily because of the scriptural evidence identifying the significance of women to God. The Genesis account of creation portrays God as Creator.

He created humanity, male and female, in his image (Gen. 1:26-27). Jasmine Fernando states that God made males and females to reflect his image (4). God also blessed “them” meaning he blessed both the male and female (Gen. 1:28). God was pleased with his creation and commented that “it was very good” (Fernando). Scripture then notes that God gave them dominion over every living creature on the earth (Fernando). In the eyes of God, men and women have dominion over every living creature. Scripture also informs humankind that, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). He designated both man and woman to be image-bearers and gave them equal dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

Secondly, this study matters because the need exists for women leaders in the church to fulfill God’s mission. Throughout the Bible, there are numerous examples of how God used women in various missional roles. Mary and the other women at the empty tomb left with directions to tell the disciples about Jesus’ resurrection (Matt. 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1-2). These women received a calling to take a message of hope missionally. The four daughters of Philip prophesied in their community (Acts 21:9). The names of the daughters may not appear in the text, but they were significant enough in the eyes of God for inclusion in Scripture. Women are vital in their workplace, yet they continue to experience inequality in their workplace as well as in the church. Even in the twenty-first century, a few denominations continue to demonstrate inequality by not allowing women to serve in the role of senior pastor. The controversial stagnation over polarized positions of ordaining women to pastoral roles continues to be a major topic (Milton; Scholer).

The third reason this study is significant relates to the importance of women in the life of communities. One must acknowledge the impact of domestic abuse on a community's ability to thrive. Women remain a vital part of society. From homemakers to professionals, to hospitality positions, and infrastructure engineers, women make tremendous socioeconomic contributions to their communities. Deborah served as the judge of Israel during the reign of King Jabin (Judg. 4). God gave her a message for Barak, that he would overtake the army of Sisera, and it came true (Judg. 4:14-22). Lydia, a female trader, sold purple cloth (Acts 16:14). She was an entrepreneur whose purple cloth was a needed commodity in her community. These two women serve as examples of women who made major economic contributions to the welfare of their communities. Not only did these women succeed as businesswomen, but they also had a personal relationship with God.

Fourth, this study matters because it will heighten the awareness of domestic abuse in the church and propel church leaders to take a more active role in this fight. Abused women may not openly reveal this phenomenon to their church families. Instead, they may choose to suffer in silence. The norms in society have conditioned women to keep silent (Spring 30). They may feel like an invisible population. Intervention among domestically abused women is necessary to help break their silence and allow them to find release from their psychological burden by naming their trauma (Leslie 29). These women sit in the congregation, yet the congregation fails to see their reality. Their relationship with God suffers due to a compromised devotional life. Abused women in our congregation would benefit from experiencing the compassion Jesus demonstrated to women who suffered from abuse, social pressures, and compromised lifestyles. Women

were not treated differently because of their gender nor denied the grace of salvation by Jesus. Instead, Jesus reached beyond the cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender barriers thus setting the stage for change. The Christian community must become educated about the high rate of domestic abuse against women and its effect on society and compassionately advocate for change. Jesus saw the disadvantage. The woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery were transformed as a result of meeting Jesus (John 4:1-30, 8:1-11). They were not scorned but vindicated. Jesus saw their humanity and advocated for their fair treatment.

As the Christian community becomes more educated regarding the high rate of domestic abuse of women, they can become agents for sharing the love of God as Jesus demonstrated. Jesus showed his humanity and love when he conversed with the woman at the well (John 4:1-30). She was an outcast because she was a Samaritan, and she chose to step outside of the ethical norms of her community (John 4:16-19). In this period of history, the expected norm for women did not include several husbands. Another custom observed in their encounter was that Samaritans did not mingle with Jews. As a result, she went to the well to draw water when there would be fewer people (John 4:7). One may ask how she felt. She did not select her race, therefore, should she have been ashamed about it? Ethically, one can only imagine the mental stress this Samaritan woman endured. Regardless of her nationality or her lifestyle, Jesus' love touched her. The compassion Jesus extended to her was against societal norms. He won her commitment to missionally serve in the plan of God to go and be a witness (John 4:7-26). She received spiritual direction and believed Jesus to be the Messiah and witnessed for Him (John 4:28-30). Similar unfair treatment occurs in cultures throughout the world.

Thankfully, missionaries come to their rescue, giving them a fresh start (Robert 134). The same call remains relevant today for the body to bring the liberating message of the Gospel to women who suffer abuse.

Finally, this study is important because it confirms the reality of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who have suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction. Women who attended the sessions noted that they were irrevocably willing to openly discuss their experiences with domestic abuse. The participants chimed in about the freedom they felt in unlocking their voices to speak about what they lived through. Understanding that God had not left them, and that God's plan of restoration included healing of hurts, pain, and mental trauma.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Abuse covers the unkind and pugnacious treatment of another person. Abuse is the process of taking advantage of and mistreating another person.

Biblical Theology is a systematic, ordered, and reasoned interpretation and application of what Scripture reveals about the Trinity to the believer for spiritual transformation by faith (Eph. 4:12).

The Church is a community of believers called by God and redeemed by the Holy Spirit who through the ministry of Christ on the cross, receives the following character – “one body,” united by “one spirit;” having “one faith, one hope, one baptism; one God

and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all” (John Wesley, Sermon #74 “Of The Church”).

Dispositional Living is the outward-bound body of Christ functioning in the community through the means of grace.

Holy Love addresses the moral character of God as an act of grace by God towards his creation (Oden 62).

Spiritual Direction is the journey towards wholeness which is becoming the image of Christ and is the goal for all believers.

Spiritual Transformation initiates with regeneration, an inner process, and progresses outwardly toward Christian perfection or transformation into the image of Christ.

Delimitations

I have an affinity to the domestic abuse women experience based on prior exposure to abusive relationships and the gratitude for the help received through a women’s center at a local church that purposed to address the needs of abused women. Therefore this research project intentionally included Christian women ages eighteen and older from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community. Ethnicity and race did not factor into women being selected for inclusion in this project. The location was the Orangeburg County library which offered ease of attending evening classes, and it served as a resource to evaluate the services offered by churches in this rural community.

The participants belonged to churches of various Christian denominations, ethnic groups, and social-economic backgrounds in Orangeburg. Because Orangeburg is a small community, some of the participants were acquainted with each other. Solicitation for

potential participants was conducted through advertisements in bulletins, newsletters, church websites, and pastoral referrals. The inclusion also encompassed women who served in leadership roles in their churches regardless of their classification as employees and volunteers. The variables employed were the researcher-designed teaching materials and the analysis of their belief and perspective of biblical theology, holy living, and dispositional living.

The exclusion of non-Christian women resulted from a need to have a common baseline of doctrinal belief for this project. The administering of a pre-test served to establish a baseline for assessing doctrinal beliefs such as the importance of worship and the sacraments in telling the story of Jesus (Webber 45). The exclusion of churches located in urban areas from the project allowed for conformity for analysis purposes. Participants younger than eighteen years old were excluded from the project due to the required biblical and doctrinal knowledge related to the instrumentation, and the pre- and post-test questionnaires utilized for intervention. It also allowed for autonomy in answering the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. Another reason for the exclusion of women under eighteen rested in the need for the participants to have the analytical ability to process the spiritual direction of the information covered during the sessions,

Review of Relevant Literature

The research involved the consultation of literature applicable to sustainable methods of intervention for spiritual direction in the lives of women who suffered domestic abuse yet remained silent in the pews of churches. Achieving this goal required the review of literature from theological, biblical, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Gleaning from literature in these categories enhanced the knowledge and

understanding concerning the issue of abuse. Also, it provided valuable information to broaden the viewpoint of the community producing a worldview of the severity of this problem. It also gave insight into the best practices in place for spiritual formation by the Christian community for women who suffer abuse in rural Orangeburg County, South Carolina.

Theological Literature Review

The relevancy of the theological literature review on the domestic abuse of women is vital to understanding their perception of God as creator, protector, and provider. Thomas C. Oden writes of the Jewish and Christian perspectives of God as Creator. Oden states that “we are given life by one who is wise and free, who creates us for our good and whose goodness is displayed throughout the creation” (128). During the literature reviews themes such as the Fall, sin, redemption, perfection, and the nature of God emerged. A few of the respected theologians noted during the literature review were, *Practicing Christian Doctrine* by Beth Felker Jones which demonstrated the importance of theology in the practice of spiritual principles in dispositional living; John Wesley’s theology touched on topics concerning Christian doctrine, but he and other authors like Kenneth J. Collins dealt extensively with Christian love. Nonna Verna Harrison is viewed by some theologians as a feminist, and she is well known as a patristic scholar. Christopher J. H. Wright has authored books on serving through Christian missions. Finally, Sandra L. Richter is an Old Testament scholar known for her writings on the book of Deuteronomy, which discuss laws that dealt with the treatment of women.

Ecclesiological Literature Review

The ecclesiological literature review provided information about the historical involvement of Christians as it relates to women and domestic abuse. While examining the ecclesiological literature, other relevant themes surfaced—themes such as the sacraments, mission, unity, doctrine, and church history. Jasmine O. Fernando, a Wesleyan student, wrote on themes like grace, faith, and equality. Other authors observed during the literature review were Wendell Willis who brings to the church his scholarly knowledge of biblical topics such as ancient texts and arguments on Paul’s Epistle of First Corinthians, and Everett Ferguson a theologian known for his extensive work on the early church who is valuable to the modern church. J. Gregory Crofford is a theologian who studied the doctrine of prevenient grace. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen and Otto Betz both bring to Christendom topics like ecumenical ecclesiology and theological aesthetics. Finally, Miroslav Volf, a systematic theologian, teaches on theological topics that help humanity to cope with the challenges of life.

Biblical Literature Review

The themes occurring in the biblical literature review were forgiveness, love, ethics, God and ethics, and community. Examining biblical literature led to the surfacing of well-known authorities in biblical studies and abuse. A few of the selected authors are H. H. Drake Williams, III, a philosopher, and theologian who serves the body in missions at European Christian Missions. Tony W. Cartledge is a professor at Campbell University Divinity School and has developed a Bible study curriculum that is rich in church history. Richard B. Hays and Christopher Wright are both biblical scholars of both the Old and

New Testaments. John Goldingay's studies in biblical theology led him to write a commentary on the Epistle of Hebrew. Goldingay is noted as an Old Testament scholar

Psychological Literature Review

The psychological literature review revealed subsets such as human development, health, shame, and hope. The knowledge gained from this perspective provided insight into the physical, emotional, and daily health in the lives of women. Ruth Barton offers a logical perspective—that a person uses emotions and moral values to facilitate a fulfilling purpose in *Strengthening the Soul*. Reginald Johnson's book *Your Personality: the Spiritual Life*, advises how one's personality influences their relationships. Dodge L. Fernald is a professor, author, and clinical psychologist who instructs students in his multifaceted field.

Sociological Literature Review:

The sociological literature review produced respected voices in this discipline. Delores E. Smith is a womanist theologian who brings a new perspective on the biblical practices and traditions for African American women. Ruth Everhart, a feminist theologian, unveils the patriarchal traditions and practices in the Bible towards women. Miroslav Volf, Dorothy C. Bass, Stephen Seamands, and David Seamands are authors on spiritual formation and its impact on an individual and within the community (Practicing). Also, Susan A. Ross who is not only known as a theologian this scholar is an acclaimed feminist theologian.

Research Methodology

The methodological design of this research product modeled itself after an adult classroom learning environment for groups. A classroom setting provided an opportunity

for the researcher to observe group dynamics. This small setting also allowed for a sense of privacy which portrayed a feeling of security. Building trust through a safe environment helped in attaining qualitative and quantitative data through the instrumentations and the methods employed for data collection, analysis, and evaluation in this project.

Type of Research

In this intervention model, a quantitative and qualitative methodology was selected to assist in obtaining representative data. An adult classroom learning environment provided an opportunity for the researcher to observe group dynamics. This small setting also allowed for a sense of privacy which portrayed a feeling of security. Building trust through a safe environment helped in attaining qualitative data through the instrumentation and the methods employed for data collection, analysis, and evaluation in this project.

Participants

In this intervention model, a quantitative and qualitative methodology was selected to assist in obtaining representative data. An adult classroom learning environment provided an opportunity for the researcher to observe group dynamics. This small setting also allowed for a sense of privacy which portrayed a feeling of security.

Instrumentation

The following four researcher-designed instruments used in this project generated data for the research: a quantitative pre- and post-survey, a journal, a teaching manual, and a focus group questionnaire.

A quantitative instrument entitled, “Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Pre-Survey” measured the levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living as identified prior to the eight week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, SC who suffered domestic abuse. Qualitative instrumentation involved journaling and a focus group discussion. The purpose was to discover what aspect of the eight-week experience for spiritual direction had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, SC who suffered abuse.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this “Discipleship for Leaders” intervention project included the following:

Quantitative surveys collected data about the eight-week experience of spiritual direction that extended from August 20, 2022, through October 15, 2022. Two weeks before the beginning of the project a pre-survey was sent electronically by Survey Monkey to the participants. The pre-survey, “Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Pre-Survey,” consisted of twenty-seven questions (Appendix A). This survey also contained demographic information. The participants returned the surveys electronically two weeks before the beginning of the sessions.

The following themes were among the topics covered in the “Discipleship For Christian Leaders” classes: (1) The Nature of God, (2) The Fall and Sin, and (3) Redemption. To facilitate each session, the researcher used a training guide entitled “The

Discipleship For Christian Leaders Manual” (Appendix M). Before the classes began, the participants responded to the survey called “Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience For Christian Leaders Pre-Survey” electronically. The pre-surveys were stored on the researcher’s computer, password-secured, in the cloud. Once the pre-surveys were printed, they were placed in a secured folder for future analysis.

Two weeks following the completion of the sessions the participants received the “Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Post-Survey” electronically via Survey Monkey. The post-survey consisted of the same twenty-seven questions asked in the pre-survey (Appendix B). However, the demographic information was not included in the post-survey. This quantitative instrumentation was employed to assess the levels of transformation as it related to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living following the eight-week experience. The participants electronically returned the post-surveys within three weeks. The post-surveys were stored on the researcher’s computer, password-secured, in the cloud. Once the post-surveys were printed, they were placed in a secured folder for future analysis.

The qualitative data utilized in this project consisted of a teaching manual, a journal, and a focus group interview. The “Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience For Christian Leaders” manual was used to teach the eight-week class (Appendix M). Each participant received a copy of the manual to use during the eight-week course. Time was allotted for interactive discussions, asking questions, and reflection.

The researcher encouraged weekly journaling. One-question prompts inspired the participants to reflect and record their observations and thoughts in their journals following each session (Appendix C). Each week the participants returned the journal

entries to the researcher. The journal entries were stored on the researcher's computer, password-secured, in the cloud. Once the journal entries were printed, they were placed in a secured folder for future analysis.

Finally, a focus group consisting of the five participants was conducted immediately following the eight-week spiritual direction experience. The participants were asked to be open in their responses. To allow the focus group participants to speak freely, a facilitator led the group and the researcher did not participate. The facilitator used five open-ended prompt questions in the focus group questionnaire to allow the participants to reflect and respond on what aspects of the eight-week spiritual direction experience impacted them transformatively (Appendix D). These questions also asked about the areas of strength and the areas of the sessions that needed improvement. The information that the facilitator gathered was secured in a locked file for analysis by the research team.

The time to complete this project was thirteen weeks. This entailed the two weeks before the beginning of the teaching sessions in which the pre-survey questionnaire was administered and returned to the researcher electronically. This was followed by the eight-week classroom teaching period facilitated by the researcher and the focus group session that immediately followed the teaching sessions. Finally, it also included the three-week period for the participants to electronically return the post-surveys to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The Spiritual Direction for Transformation Research Project's design allowed the use of the Discipleship For Leaders pre- and post-qualitative surveys to measure the

levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction. The information garnered from the open-ended questions was analyzed using a Likert Scale, and a literal reading process captured keywords and phrases that emerged from the data. A team of researchers analyzed the data in a secluded area for security purposes. The participants acknowledged their understanding concerning the completion of an online questionnaire and permitted the project's use of the collected data.

The use of personal journals, which the participants employed throughout the sessions for reflective writing, and the focus group's open-ended questions allowed for the measuring of the effectiveness of the research project. A literal reading technique was employed to capture keywords and phrases that emerged during the data analysis. Then, interpretive reading helped to organize the data by topics that surfaced. The extrapolated topics permitted the implications of the data to be analyzed. Finally, reflexive reading allowed the researcher to analyze the data retrospectively. Another reader reviewed the data to reduce the incidence of errors and biases. Incorporating a triangulation framework and using a multi-method approach to the analysis process allowed for a higher degree of convergence in the data. The use of data theme analysis allowed the researcher to apply pattern theory analysis in the organization of the data. Identifying patterns in the data increased the preciseness of its interpretation. Following the completion of the data review, evaluation, and analysis, the researcher transferred a summary of the evaluation to a table format document for further analysis and in preparation for communicating the results.

Generalizability

This project is significant because it researches the issue of the abuse of women which is prevalent in the world. The abuse of women is not a new occurrence. History records the abuse of women from the first account of a biblical relationship—when Adam blamed Eve for disobeying God (Gen 3:1-14). Although the implementation of this project occurred in the rural county of Orangeburg, South Carolina in the United States of America, the generalizability of this project, as it relates to trustworthiness and significance, allows for its global applicability.

The applicability of trustworthiness lies in the design of this spiritual direction experience. The location, curriculum, schedule, and other variables allows for the extrapolation of this discipleship experience. The significance of this project rests on understanding the problem of the abuse of women as a global phenomenon. Abuse knows no race, age, or gender. Although the rate of occurrence may fluctuate with certain variables, abuse still occurs globally. The findings may vary slightly in similar situations due to geography or customs.

Utilizing different modes of communication to obtain participants was a measure of precaution that ensured the credibility of the study. The deliverance of advertisements by referrals, notices, or electronically occurred to randomly selected Christian churches in the Orangeburg community. Ethnicity, culture, and denomination were not a limitation of this research. The spiritual direction design of this project was the sole reason for choosing Christianity.

To determine its significance, this research project employed similar qualitative methods that many researchers utilize. The use of literal, interpretive, and reflexive

reading allowed for the data analysis. The use of data themes analysis and pattern analysis garnered information systematically for evaluation. Closely following the outlined methodology and using a multi-method approach to evaluate the data allowed for triangulation (Sensing 197).

Project Overview

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who have suffered abuse and attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

Chapter One provided a framework for investigating the levels of spiritual transformation. It discussed the rationale for the project and the format for the literature review. The chapter ended with the design of instrumentation to offer qualitative research that provided a higher degree of preciseness for data interpretation.

Chapter Two discusses the literature reviewed for this project. It includes some of the most influential writers and practitioners regarding abused women and sustainable lifestyles. The use of scholarly articles, books, dissertations, and other resources provides a comprehensive review. Chapter two concludes with a summary of the critical variable to be studied as identified in the literature and an explanation of their anticipated relationship to this project.

Chapter Three outlines the numerous ways used to investigate the research questions. This includes a more detailed report on how the research questions were

answered. Both the method of collecting and analyzing data and the instrumentation utilized are employed in this process. This chapter ends with a list of general references.

Chapter Four analyzes the findings that emerged from qualitative and quantitative research methods. The findings helped to support the value of the project for the practice of ministry. Quantitative methods consisted of a pre- and post-survey, and the qualitative methods utilized journal entries from the participants and a focus group interview. A summary of the major findings is completed in this chapter.

Chapter Five outlines the study's major findings with implications for each discovery now and in the future. This chapter consists of two sections. Section one is an analysis of the components and inquiry in sub-areas. The synthesis constituted putting the parts together to form something new—an idea, theory, or problem solution. The discussion on findings highlights significant literature for validation of the research study. This chapter ends with recommendations for solutions.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation concerning biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, among adult Christian women from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community who have suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction. Therefore, to gain an understanding of the propensity of abuse to impact the treatment of women in the twenty-first century, this chapter reviewed literature that is pertinent to the study concerning domestic abuse of Christian women.

The research began with a review of the biblical history of abuse. Then, the research moved to the theological foundations surrounding the abuse of Christian women. Utilizing the three elements of (1) biblical theology, (2) holy love, and (3) dispositional living was relevant to understanding if the perception and treatment of women in both the Old and the New Testament divisions of the Bible contributed to the continuation of domestic violence towards women. The research ended with an analysis of the disciplines of ecclesiology, psychology, and sociology for their perspectives on domestic abuse. The literature review chapter ends with a synopsis of the research design and a summary of the chapter.

Biblical Foundations

An analysis of how women were perceived biblically enables an understanding of the historical nature underlying the continuation of domestic abuse toward women. Historically, women have been viewed as less than men and their devaluation has

ultimately led to them being disrespected, disregarded, mistreated, and abused. Biblical studies have revealed the aberrant contention and conflict concerning how women were treated in a male-dominated culture as it related to being created in the image of God.

The Wesleyan tradition rests on the premise that Scripture is primary for guidance, making it important for everyday living. Thus, this review began with the use of Scripture. The concept of God's plan for women is undergirded with a solid foundation based on biblical and theological themes. An understanding of how women were viewed biblically and in the context of a historically patriarchal society, leads to an understanding of the love God has for his creation and that anything that falls short of God's intention and purpose is misuse and abuse.

Old Testament Women

Through biblical theology, the observation of Scripture began with a portrayal of God as Creator (Gen. 1:1). In the role of the creator, the Genesis account illustrated God orchestrating the creation of the universe (Gen. 2-8). Genesis continued its narrative of the creation story with God stating, "Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]" (*AMP. Bible*, Gen. 1:26). The apex of God's final wondrous display of power concluded with the creation of man (*KJB*, Gen. 1:26, 2:7; Waltke 74–78; T. White 2). God created man in his image and likeness and placed man in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:8, 5:3, 9:6; Hicks, et al. 141). God had prepared the Garden for occupation by his created beings.

God called the created man by the name "Adam" (*adam*) which means mankind (Gen. 2:19; "Genesis 2:8"). Thus, "Adam" is the first appearance of a name in Scripture

and it occurred through the spoken words of God Almighty (“Bible Hub;” Waltke). The Hebrew word “Adam” constituted a generic species consisting of both the male and the female (Horowitz 175). In further support of the meaning of “in his likeness,” Genesis gave another account, “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him, male and female created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created” (*ARSV* Gen. 5:1-2). The research suggested that man and woman collectively were the species that God created, and God alone marked their character and purpose.

Stephen E. Fowl believed the concept of biblical text having ideologies becomes problematic in that “over its life, a text can be pressed into the service of so many varied and potentially conflicting ideologies that talk about a text having an ideology will become increasingly strained” (18). Still, in contrast to John Wesley’s Quadrilateral, which imposes Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience as elements for biblical reflection, Ed Christian believed that “when we impose our human reasoning, traditions, or experience on the Bible, we are guilty of judging the Word by our own ideas” (Christian 285). For example, there remains controversy surrounding interpreting the text in 1 Timothy 2:13 concerning women which regarded the “ideologies” imposed on the writer as well as the culture (*KJV*, 1 Tim. 2:9-15, 3:11; West 162). Then there was disagreement with the concept that ideologies impacted the writers. This included comparing Paul’s inferred meaning of the text (1 Tim. 2:9-15, 3:11) to Peter’s attempt to bring clarity to Paul’s text in his writing (2 Peter 3:14-16). The Genesis account of creation with Adam and Eve is another text that remains controversial.

Eve

World leaders like Nelson Mandela and Mary Robinson believe the religious sector of society reflected the situation within the domestic sector of society and must end gender-based violence and gender inequality (Machel). Intimate partner violence (IPV) of all forms continued to be considered an epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control. Thankfully, some scholars and advocates progressed the creation theory that man and woman are created in the *imago Dei*. Jurgen Moltmann stated:

Theological tradition has always understood God's image as a mirror-reflection of God himself. The God who allows himself to be represented on earth by his image; and the image becomes an indirect revelation of his divine being in earthly form. The more egalitarian view takes on the idea that Adam (man) is the Hebrew word understood in the generic sense of man as a human being and not only as male ("*God in Creation*" 220).

Scholars agreed that "Adam" meant male and female. Still, theologians and scholars in the religious sector continue to wrestle with the ideology of women being equal to men even though women reflect the image of God (Groth; Horowitz 175-79).

Male superiority is presumed to be based on order creation. In Genesis 1 and 2, order creation is deemed legitimate in determining the God-assigned roles and functionality to his human creations called male and female. Thus, creation theology surmises that women are subordinate to men and therefore subservient because Adam was formed first (Gen. 2:7, 15; 1 Tim. 3:16). Still, with biblical theology, one gains the

ability to observe God's created beings equally as the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26).

Scripture denoted that God spoke equally to his created man using the following words, "and let them" (Gen. 1:26b, 1:28a). The pronoun "them" denoted plurality. Scripture brought clarity by expressing that the word "them" referred to "male and female" (Gen. 1:27, 5:1-2); not in a hierarchal sense but equally represented (Gen. 2:18-25). Just as God has authority, God gave Adam and Eve authority to rule (Gen. 1:26-28, 2:19-20). Thus, mankind is designed in the image of the creator and destined to create and rule. Through the creation story of Eve, women can understand that they are valued in God's eyes having "self-awareness, personal freedom, a measure of self-determination, and personal responsibility for their actions" (Borland).

Feminist theology states that the man is not greater than the woman, nor is the woman greater than the man. Rather, they were created as equals. God formed Eve from Adam's rib and they were given purpose. Adam and Eve were to become representatives of God in caring for the earth and his creation (Gen. 2:18-25). Paul Washer, a prominent pastor noted that the purpose of mankind is encompassed in conformity to the will of God. He stated that God's will is for mankind to move boundaries to expand the kingdom of the Lord "which is the glory of God.". Washer further believed that though God has authorized man to subdue and replenish, still, the creature "man" is created and designed for the pleasure and will of God.

Being deceived by the serpent in the garden, Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit from which sin entered the lives of humanity. Adam and Eve were suddenly aware of good and evil and realized that they were naked (Gen. 3:7, 10-11). As they heard God

walking in the garden, Adam and Eve were shamed of their state and hid from God. Eve was ashamed that she was deceived by the serpent and when Adam blames her for their sin, Eve quickly blames the snake (Gen. 3:12-13). This is the first time that shame, blame, and lies are noted in Scripture.

Tamar

The story of Tamar brought to light the lack of value, moral worth, and inherent dignity placed on women (Gen. 38). Tamar was given in marriage to two of Judah's sons; however, both sons die. Er, the oldest son, married Tamar but died as a result of his evil ways. Then, Onan married Tamar but sinned by refusing to give his deceased brother a child and his consequence was death (Gen. 38:6, 7-10; 1 Chron. 4:21). Judah, afraid that the last son, Shelah, could die lied when he promised Tamar that Shelah would marry her when the son became of age (Gen. 38:11). Years later, Tamar—possibly feeling emotionally abused—realized that Judah had no intentions of allowing his younger son to marry her and devised a plan to trick Judah into lying with her in exchange for a pledge of goodwill (Gen. 38:14-18). Judah agreed thinking that he was with a prostitute (Gen. 38:18-23). Judah heard of Tamar's immorality, as she is with child, and ordered her to be burned (Gen. 38:24).

Tamar respected Judah as the caretaker of the clan which was customary in the patriarchal tribal culture of ancient Israel (Richter 23). Although Tamar was a marginalized member of Judah's family, the laws of the land still applied but Judah refused to obey the laws (Deut. 25:5-10). When Judah's messenger arrived to inform Tamar of her fate, she produced the items pledged to her by Judah (Gen. 38:25). Judah recognized the items that Tamar sent to him by his messenger and Judah repented of his

sin (Gen. 38:26). Judah failed to uphold his patriarchal duty to give Shelah to Tamar in marriage, so Tamar gave birth to a child for her deceased husband.

The story of Tamar is a story of hope. For Tamar, the hope lay in the continuation of her deceased husband's name according to the law (Deut. 25:7). Yet, there is a greater hope—a hope for the future of humanity in the promise which God gave to Adam and Eve. For the deceiving acts by the serpent in the garden, God proclaimed a promise of hope—that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the enemy (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 132:11; Isa. 7:14; Jer. 31:22; Micah 5:3).

Many interpretations stemmed from analyzing the meaning of Genesis 38 which posed tension among scholars, like Esther Menn, concerning the promise of Genesis 3:15. Menn gave a few examples stating that the *Testament of Judah* portrayed a weak warrior while the *Targum Neofiti* alluded to the moral behavior of Judah and Tamar, and finally “the *Genesis Rabba* depicted Genesis 38 as a series of providential and miraculous events leading to the origin of the royal and messianic lineage from the union of two worthy ancestors” (2). A consideration of each begged the attention and consideration of the providence of God in the face of retribution alongside righteous reasoning. While Tamar was initially scorned for her unrighteous deed, she was later affirmed by Judah and thus redeemed from the pending penalty.

The union of Jacob to Tamar, a Canaanite woman, did not align with the traditions of the patriarchs, “Abram and Sarai, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah/Rachel” (Gen. 24, 27:46 – 28:2; Love 2; Hays 524). Scholars failed to view the encounter of Jacob and Tamar as “royal and messianic” as observed by Menn. However, some scholars agreed that the birth of Perez, Judah, and Tamar kept the messianic plan

alive until its fulfillment as God promised in Genesis 3:15 (Love 519–32; J. Clifford 197). The book of Ruth mentioned Perez as an ancestor to King David, thus, the promise of Genesis 3:15 is kept alive (Gen. 4:18-22) (Clifford 197; Emerton 406). And God used a woman to keep the promise alive. From a moralistic perspective, Tamar's punishment would have been death. Thus, the design of God rendered the promise fulfilled and a questionable deed deemed righteous.

Judah, when convicted of his failure as the patriarch of his family, repented and sought forgiveness from Tamar. Richard Clifford viewed Judah's repentance for not fulfilling his lawful duty to Tamar as a "conversion encounter" (519-22). Genesis noted that Judah initially acted out of fear for his son Shelah since his first two sons who were married to Tamar had died (Gen. 38:11). Judah realized that Tamar's behavior was more righteous than his as she acted in exercising "faithfully her familial right and responsibility" (198). Thus, in his act of forgiveness, Jacob redeemed Tamar (Gen. 38:26).

Tamar received restoration as she delivered her twin sons, Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38:27-30). The birth stood as an act of mercy by God. A Canaanite woman who was discarded is elevated to a place of honor as she bore sons for her deceased husband. The redemptive story does not end with the birth of Perez. The midwife expected Perez to be born after his twin brother, but Tamar gave birth to the youngest twin first. The midwife surprisingly stated, "So this is how you have broken out" (Gen. 38:29). The birth of Perez is viewed as a breakthrough of the promise because "Judah will become the tribe of kings, so it matters greatly which twin gets the inheritance" (Wilson). The sovereign God deemed the youngest twin as the receiver of the birthright. Perez is in the bloodline of

David (Ruth 4:18-22). Through David's bloodline the Messiah came to fulfill the promise in Genesis 3:15 (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6). God's providential plan was for the lineage of Jesus to be traced from Perez.

Proverbs 31 Woman

Often when speaking of church history, the term "Church Fathers" is used. Jon L. Berquist refers to this as a period when women slipped into the background of a patriarchal time and were silenced, but her story must be reclaimed (6-9). This statement reflects the belief of other theologians such as Karen Teel and Pamela Cooper-White whose writings reflect the male-dominated culture of the Old and New Testament. Yet, there are heroines in the Old Testament who demonstrate characteristics of a transformative life (4-5). The virtuous woman is one such story that continues to be referenced in Christian circles.

The pericope is found in Proverbs 31 and categorically addressed the virtuous woman's role as a wife, mother, domesticity, and businesswoman but the message rested in her character. This female figure is portrayed as "Wisdom" personified encouraging young men to seek after her teaching and not the path of "seduction and folly" (Sandra Smith). In ancient Israel, it took bravery for a woman to venture into the business world and trade at the city gate where men discussed and resolved political and sociological issues (Prov. 31:23). Yet, this woman demonstrated a prominent level of integrity to represent her marriage and motherhood well in the community. The Hebrew word *eshet Chayil* is translated as "woman of valor" thus the words "a virtuous woman, who can find" denoted the praise this woman of valor received from her husband (R. Evans;

Sandra Smith). In each of her roles, the character of this virtuous woman remained the focus of the loving praise she received.

Subsequently, the example of a woman who exemplified how every day love affects one's community is the virtuous woman. The community benefited from her love and loyalty as she spent her time well and extended her hands and heart to meet the needs of her household as well as of those whom she encountered, whether in business or peril. Her honor and value are complimented by her husband who valued her over rubies and placed his confidence in her. Thus, he cherished and took delight in her and saw that she lacked nothing (Prov. 31:10-11). Her children called her blessed. Her husband praised her (Prov. 31:28): Love and commendation set a high standard and raised the bar for men in the community.

Community life was important to men as well. The husband sang Proverbs 31 to his wife in an act of praise. This Proverb addressed the outstanding character this wife possessed. Proverb 31 speaks of the woman as a "person" not about her accomplishments (R. Evans). This Proverb continues to receive high accolades at certain Christian celebrations and events as an outline of what a virtuous woman does.

New Testament Women

The New Testament allowed for the systemic abuse of women as was the case in the Old Testament. Thus, an understanding of the cultural cues in the New Testament helped in the interpretation of the values and worldview of its members and provided the framework of all its communication. Some of the values observed in the New Testament that helped to form the early church were "honor, patronage, kinship, and purity" (deSilva 19). David deSilva believed that a thorough understanding of the values of honor

and purity will allow for a better comprehension of the narrative surrounding the cultural importance of kinship and patronage (deSilva 20). The honor of men attributed to the patriarchal narrative of the Old Testament posed the basis for understanding cultural cues in the New Testament (deSilva 20-22).

The Roman code of law failed to see women as equal. This code viewed men as the father of the family “*pater familias*” (Adamah; “Family Life”). The Roman Code was an aggressive Code. For example, a man could abuse his wife for disrespect even if the abuse was violent and piloted her death. The male power was viewed as “supreme and absolute” to the point of having the freedom to sell his family into slavery (Fader).

Biblical laws did not include such barbaric behavior as seen in many of the ancient Eastern cultures. The law did not punish women physically for the violence they experienced for which they were not at fault. The biblical law deemed the offender as the perpetrator and thus the offender was punished (Deut. 22:25-27; McCoy). Nonetheless, under the Deuteronomic laws, women remained subjected to the patriarchal system even in the New Testament.

Woman With the Issue of Blood

The text concerning the woman with the issue of blood posed itself as an interesting topic for scholars. Two factors surfaced in the discourses listed in Matthew 9:19-22; Mark 5:25-34; and Luke 8:40-48. The first factor was whether the “issue of blood” was a regular or irregular flow. Understanding whether the flow of blood was regular, or irregular would determine if the woman suffered from an illness or if she were experiencing the regular female occurrence of her menstrual cycle. Due to the length of time, she is listed as suffering, twelve years, most scholars agree that the illness was

serious, irregular, and even posed immanence of death (Weissenrieder 265). Thus, Weissenrieder believed that the emphasis lies not on the uncleanness of this woman instead the focus rested on the cure this suffering woman received from Jesus (280–81). Jesus offered her a cure for a costly disease she sought help from physicians for twelve years.

In the Hebrew Law blood outside of a woman's body was considered to make her unclean (Lev. 15:19, 25). The woman with the issue of blood was ostracized for a natural female occurrence because anyone who came in her presence was made unclean (Baert; Lev. 15:9-20). The menstruation process was also known as a process of purifying her body. A woman who experienced the purifying process was not allowed to enter the temple until the days of her purifying were fulfilled (Lev 12:4-7). Alisha Riepma wrote that "it is unfortunate that the bloodshed by women routinely for the sake of giving life has been shamed throughout history, while the bloodshed by men in battle—in the act of taking life—is honored" ("Woman Who").

The second factor concerned the cure of hemorrhaging (*haemorrhoid*). The question posed about her healing stems from whether it occurred through medicine, magic, a miracle aligned to the care of oneself, mysterious forces, or from influences from the gods (Baert 666; Hyman; Schussler-Fiorenza). There was also controversy surrounding whether Jesus disregarded Jewish laws in healing her. Barbara Baert dismantles the theories including the question of whether the woman was not experiencing the menstrual cycle. Baert references Mark 5:25, 29 stating that the woman with the issue of blood has been hemorrhaging for twelve years and that her fountain of blood dried up (666). Baert views this as healing of an irregular occurrence.

Other scholars tend to believe that “uncleanness” is a factor in this story because of the sandwich technique used in the telling of this story in the gospel of Luke (Schussler-Fiorenza). In Luke, the story of the healing of Jairus’ daughter was sandwiched between the story of the woman with an issue of blood. Luke moved from the story of Jairus’ ill daughter who was facing imminent death (8:40-42) to the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (8:43-48), who was unclean due to the Mosaic Law (Lev. 15). Both Mark and Luke returned to the story of Jairus’ daughter who was now unclean due to death and showed Jesus, restoring her life. Both women have been healed and restored from a state of uncleanness.

Amidst the story of this impoverished isolated woman, Mark injected hope—the woman heard of the numerous accounts of healing Jesus had done and she believed that Jesus could heal her (Mark 5:25-27). The woman with the issue of blood became afraid when Jesus asked who touched me (Mark 5:30-33). Jesus knew the Levitical Law stated that he would be considered unclean if touched but Jesus did not rebuke her for touching him or for being in the crowd (Weissenrieder 8; Branch). Instead of rejecting her, Jesus extended understanding and grace from a compassionate heart to the woman with an issue of blood.

Because of her bravery, Jesus pronounced her “whole” (*Sozo*) meaning both physical and spiritual healing (Mark 5:34; Branch). This woman became the only woman to both seek out healing for herself and to be called daughter by Jesus. By calling the woman with the issue of blood “daughter Jesus gave her kinship” and may offer her protection as was customary in the patriarchal system of the Old Testament (Mark 5:34;

Branch). Jesus' calling this woman "daughter" was similar to Boaz's calling Ruth "daughter" (Ruth 2:8).

Woman Caught in Adultery

The pericope found in John 7:53-8:11 presented a story of Jesus being confronted by religious leaders about the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees and scribes wanted Jesus' assessment of what to do with her (John 8:3-4). Before asking his opinion, they reminded him of the Law of Moses concerning adulterers which stated that "such should be stoned" (John 8:5). Scripture notes that the accusers stated that the woman was caught in the act of adultery however the research revealed that this was a trick question to find means to bring accusations against Jesus (John 8:6). The woman caught in adultery appeared in John but not in the synoptic gospels.

The originality of this pericope remained problematic among scholars due to the uncertainty of its historicity and authenticity. The questionability of the text stimulated Scott Kaczorowski to conduct an inquiry into the external and internal data to resolve concerns about its canonicity. His findings were two-fold, first reviewing manuscripts and textual types across various geographical locations did not verify the originality of the text plus the inability to pinpoint the time of its first writing was problematic (Kaczorowski 331–33; Zylstra 46).

The placement of this pericope posed another challenge for interpreters. From the 2nd until the 15th centuries the story is omitted in many early manuscripts. Later, when the text does appear in a few minuscules, its placement signified its lack of originality (Kaczorowski 332). Scholars learned that in some minuscules the pericope was placed after John 7:36 or inserted into the gospel of Luke (21:38) (Kaczorowski 323;

Witherington 28; Mahoney). Luke 21:38 and John 8:1 state that Jesus is on the Mount of Olives instructing the people. The location where Jesus taught appeared in both gospels and therefore may account for why the early manuscripts placed the text in Luke 21:38.

Kaczorowski found that in the American manuscripts, the text was located at the very end of the gospel of John (326). Then, in the 11th century, the text was revised in the Old Georgian manuscripts and placed after John 7:44. Textual critic Bart Ehrman believed in the historicity and authenticity of the text because it contained synoptic elements observed in other stories about Jesus such as vocabulary (Metzger and Ehrman, 334–37). Scholars continue to seek answers concerning the historicity and authenticity of this text (Kaczorowski 337).

Another issue with this passage was whether it was Johannine. The pericope was thought to have been an insertion in the gospel of John because of the fluidity of the letter (Kaczorowski 334–335). Jesus' discourse with the people on the Mount of Olives appeared to stop in 7:52 and then continues in 8:12. Versus an awkward transition from Jesus' discourse with the people to the text of the adulteress woman in John 8:3. Another element noted was Jesus' quick and clever response to the question that the religious leaders posed which were similar to other gospel stories (John 8:7; Mark 12:15b–17, 24–27; Kaczorowski 337).

The fourth and fifth centuries writings of Augustine, along with the attestation of Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis added validity to the story. Although Papias' memory may account for the deviations in the written account wherein the adulteress is noted as having had many affairs (Kaczorowski 330–32). Regardless of the controversy, interpreters believed the canonicity and authenticity have been demonstrated as

Johannine (Kaczorowski 335; Gench 398). By the third century, an attestation of the story existed in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Knust). The inclusion of this pericope in Mark was thought to demonstrate the mercy of God.

Other factors emerged from studying this text. Frances Gench wondered why the woman was presented to Jesus without the male offender which alluded to a double standard existing within the culture (398). The Levitical Law mentioned by the Pharisees stated that “the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death” (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Another consideration associated with the law was breaking the sixth commandment as stated in Exodus 20:14 (Mahoney). However, only the female was presented to Jesus in the text (John 8:3).

The gospel of John depicted the scribes and Pharisees bringing the accused woman into the crowd. Setting this woman in the crowd to publicly shame her served as a trap for Jesus. These religious leaders were using her to cause Jesus to either stone her and go against the Roman law which prohibited the Jews from putting anyone to death (John 18:31) or not stone her and disregard the law of Moses (Bergant; Mahoney). Jesus did not engage in their ploy of bringing shame by disregarding the emotions of this woman who was being displayed publicly.

The research suggested that feminist theologians such as Dianne Shirlaw-Ferreira believed that Jesus’ compassionate response demonstrated that God saw men and women as equal. Jesus did not ridicule the adulteress as the religious leaders desired. Instead, Jesus wrote on the ground and asked who was without sin (John 8:7). Feeling convicted, the Scripture says the religious leaders walked away from Jesus, beginning with the eldest (John 8:9). When Jesus asked where her accusers were, she replied that there was

no one (John 8:11) In an act of mercy Jesus announced that her sins are forgiven and freed her to go without condemnation (John 8:11; Rom. 8:1).

Divorced Women

The biblical foundation for divorce was initiated with the law given in the Old Testament (Deut. 24:1, 3; Lev. 21:14, 22:13; Num. 30:9). Divorce is explicitly referred to by Jesus in New Testament texts (Matt. 5:31-32, 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Jesus referenced the text found in Deuteronomy 24 (Matt, 5:31-32, 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-11). The text in Deuteronomy 24:4 addresses divorcing a woman who had committed adultery and remarries but finds herself either divorced again or a widow. In such a case, the first husband cannot remarry the woman. To take the woman back becomes an abomination (Moloney 272). Interestingly, this text did not reference the consequences for the male offender.

Beginning with the first century, women were allowed to divorce but little data exists concerning the particulars surrounding the cases of divorce. The Jewish nation relied on the Mosaic Law or the Torah for many of their decisions this included decisions concerning divorce. The Mosaic Law is the law found in the Torah or the first five books of the Bible. The Israelites placed the Mosaic Law on the side of the Ark of the Covenant as a witness against them (Deut. 31:24-6; Lawrence, "What is the Difference"). The Torah and the Laws of Moses are "used interchangeably in Scripture" and Moses was given the task of codifying the Torah (Lawrence, "The Gospels Decoded"). The Law as stated in Exodus 20 is eternal and is a "reflection of the heart, mind, will, and righteous character of Elohim" and was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant (Lawrence "What is the Difference"). Paul references the Law as being spiritual (Rom. 7:14). Lawrence

believes that the Law points to Jesus, the living water (John 4:10, Lawrence "Gospels Decoded"). The topic of divorce is discussed in the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy (22:13-19, 28-29; 24:1-4) and Malachi (2:10-16). In the Hellenistic culture, husbands generally divorced their wives for misbehavior with few restrictions until the fourth century (Grubbs 187). The patriarchal system continued to dominate in devising the rules as seen in Paul's discourse on marriage, divorce, and widowhood to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 7:27).

Francis Moloney wrote that two voices were sources of the Hellenistic culture of the New Testament. The two persons were "Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-40 CE), a Jew who worked strenuously to make Jewish traditions relevant to a Hellenistic world, and Josephus (37-200 CE), a Jewish historian who wrote significant commentaries on the Jewish War and the History of Jewish life and practice" (Grubbs 273). However, neither Alexandria nor Josephus wrote extensively on the topic of divorce. The second pericope in Malachi 2:10-16 disclosed God's hatred of divorce. Yet, the research revealed that Jesus did not reference this text (Grubbs 273). The text referenced an unfaithful husband who abandoned the wife of his youth. This is a highly controversial text among theologians and thus, was discarded from further review.

In the New Testament, divorce appeared to be a controversial topic. The Pharisees asked Jesus if the law permitted divorce for any reason (Matt. 19:3, 7). Scripture stated that the Pharisees already knew the answer, they were attempting to trick Jesus. The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is one of the common themes in the gospel of Matthew (MacArthur). Jesus responded to the Pharisees stating, "Because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning, it was not

so” (Matt. 19:8). Jesus’ response informed the Pharisees that the law of Moses was relaxed to prevent further evils because of their low moral state (Fausset, The Gospel). Jesus brought clarity to the Mosaic law without becoming entangled in the trap of the Pharisees.

Matthew’s gospel depicted Jesus addressing the topic of divorce again. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught his disciples about spiritual standards like holiness and dispositional living (Matt. 19:5-7). In this discourse, Jesus stated that a divorce decree could be allowed. However, Jesus offered clarity stating, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whosoever shall marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matt. 19:9, 5:31-32). In the passages of Scripture found in Matthew chapters 5 and 19, Jesus alluded to the sacredness of marriage. Jesus repeated this teaching in Luke 16:18 in response to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

The sacredness of marriage is symbolic of the holy love seen in the relationship of the Trinity by the Council of Bishops of the Catholic Church (“What the Early Church Believed”). Their findings were that the Father revealed his selfless love in sending Jesus and Jesus portrayed the love of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (Wingfield and Wingfield 35–38). Just as the persons in the Trinity maintained their identity, married couples were to maintain their identity within the covenantal marriage. Thus, the Christian marriage as a metaphor for the Trinity should reflect the life and self-giving love of the Trinity (Wingfield and Wingfield 35–38; Lawler and Salzman). The research showed the self-giving love or holy love of the Trinity was evident in their communion with each other.

The loving communion among the personhood of the Trinity is called the doctrine of *perichoresis*. This refers to the binding connection seen among the Trinity, the nature of Jesus who was God and man, and it refers to the omnipresence of God with humanity through the Holy Spirit (“What Is the Meaning”). So, through Adam “*adam*,” who is created in the image of God, humanity became the image of the process of *perichoresis* in God. This became even more factual in the sanctity of marriage.

Academically, the highly controversialism concerning divorce in the Hellenistic culture may explain why there was limited data on the topic. Although it did appear to be an accepted practice by the Jewish legal tradition a unilateral divorce could be requested by either the husband or the wife while taking into consideration sterility, dowry, as well as remarriage (Grubbs 187; Moloney 272). By the sixth century, the Christian Emperor Justinian formed a filtered compilation of marriages and divorces of the first three centuries called “the Digest and the Code of Justinian” which served to give some understanding of life in the Roman Empire (Moloney 276).

As observed in the text from the gospel of Matthew, the topic of divorce posed controversy for dispositional living in the New Testament. Two popular schools of thought surround this topic. The first school of thought by Rabbi Shammai was not as well-received due to its strict interpretation while the second ideology, by Rabbi Hillel, was less restrictive and its perspective was more popular (qtd. in Guzik). Rabbi Shammai’s theory believed “that “uncleanness meant sexual immorality and was the only valid cause for a divorce” contrasted with Rabbi Hillel who believed that a man could divorce his wife for any reason that displeased him (Guzik). These two ideologies about divorce made dispositional living within the Christian community of the New Testament

difficult as demonstrated in the discourse between the Pharisees and Jesus in Matthew chapter 19.

Women in General - Galatians 3:23-29

In this Galatians' pericope, Paul made a two-fold argument concerning the plan of God regarding living in a community. He began with an intricate exegetical presentation of the Mosaic Law and its provision for the Israelites (Gal. 3:23-24). Paul then transitioned to the new covenant (Gal. 3:25-29). Paul spoke of the promise that was given to Abraham. The promise would be an act of grace from God the Father by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Placing the selected segment of chapter 3 in context of the whole chapter helps to bring clarity to how Paul arrived at the climax found in verses 23-29 (E. Johnson). The promise is not a replicate of the old laws and beliefs of ancient Israel which were provisional and temporary. Johnson believed the promise presents hope for the future. A community of believers not divided but living as one body—the body of Christ.

The law was given to Moses to serve a purpose for the nation of Israel. The nation was rebellious and unfaithful to God (Num. 14:11). Scripture gave insight into how God expected his children to be faithful to the law. First John states, "This is the law of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome" (NKJV, 1 John 5:3). However, scholars believed a flaw was found in the law in that it did not meet with faith (*KJV* Heb. 4:2). They indicated that the law was provisional because it could not provide the fulfillment of the promise. The Israelites had witnessed the power of God and they feared the Lord (Exod. 14:31). What the law provided was to restrain Israel temporarily until the promise came. The *Contemporary English Version* of the Bible

reads, “The Law controlled us and kept us under its power until the time came when we would have faith” (Gal. 3:23).

Paul referred to the law as the “schoolmaster” or *paidagogos*. The Greek meaning of this term was not to instruct the student; instead, it means to take the student to school to receive instruction. In the Greek culture, wealthy families had schoolmasters or slaves whose responsibility included caring for and disciplining the children until they were mature; this included taking them to school and assisting with homework (E. Johnson; Morrison). The reference Paul made is that the law could only take the children of God to the promise. The law could not give the children of God a new heart nor could it give the inheritance provided through the promise. The law could not provide for justification which comes through Christ by faith (*KJV*, Rom. 5:1).

This new Christian community was privileged to have a well-educated Jewish scholar, Paul, teach them about the love of God. This pericope followed a conclusive statement “But the Scripture shut up all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (*ASV*, Gal. 3:22). Paul reminded the Gentile audience in Galatia about the historical practices. The circumcision party, a group of Christ believers, was insisting that all Gentiles must follow the Law (Berzon). At the beginning of chapter 3 of Galatians, Paul dealt with how the law required circumcision to receive the promises of the old covenant (*KJV*, Gal. 3:1-5). Before faith, all were kept under the law (Gal. 3:23). But the law was temporary and pointed to Christ (Witt; E. Johnson). Through Christ, the requirement for circumcision was fulfilled. E. Johnson believed that Jesus wanted these Galatian believers to be reminiscent that it was not by vain works that Jesus performed miracles but by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:5).

Paul's emphasis is that through Christ all are freed and equal. His religious acumen was necessary as the believers in Galatia were being prosecuted for not following the Mosaic Law relative to food and circumcision. E. Johnson notes that Paul reminded the Galatians that (1) the law could not bring justification which came only through the cross (Gal. 3:10-14), (2) the promise was received by faith and chronologically preceded the Mosaic law by 430 years (Gal. 3:15-18), and (3) the law was "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator," Moses, while God spoke the promise directly to Abraham (Gal. 3:19-20). Paul's words reminded them of their salvation which came not through the law but Christ.

In Galatians 3:23, Paul wrote that the law or *nomos*, the Mosaic law, and the Torah, existed before "faith came." Faith offered people a path to break the confinement of sin. The verse continued stating that all were "shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed" meaning that Christ would be revealed (Gal. 3:23). Paul stated that "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). Scholars believed that Christ was revealed and broke the bondage of the law. The result is that all humanity is freed to become children of God by faith.

In Galatians 3: 26-29, Paul wrote that the promise of faith in Jesus Christ was given that all who believed to become children of God and heirs of the promise (Morrison). Scholars believed putting on Christ signified that the believer was adopted into the family of God (Gal. 3:26). This occurred through baptism. Thus, baptism was not "a mere empty sign but a means of spiritual transference" (Fausset) whereby human beings became one with Christ (Rom. 6:5-7; John 17:20-23). Paul's conclusive

announcement was that the grace of God provided for a universal soteriological opportunity through saving faith.

The opportunity received by faith became open for all in Christ. In the patriarchal system of the Old Testament legal system, men had the advantage of ruling over women. Women were submissive to ridicule, domestic violence, and shame brought about by the patriarchal system within their society. The law required men to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant, not women; and the law allowed men to be kings and priests while in Christ all are “Kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6; Fausset). Circumcision was not a requirement for inclusion (1 Cor. 7:18). In Christ, all are equal. In Galatians, Paul says “There is neither male nor female” in Christ, all are equally children of God and heirs of the promise (NKJV, Gal.3:28).

Paul's unifying conclusion of Galatians 3 summarized all he stated (*KJV*, Gal. 3:28-29). No longer should the Gentile believers view themselves differently from the Jews. When a person is in Christ there is no consideration of their ethnic group, enslavement, or gender (Gal. 3:28; E. Johnson). Baptism into the body of Christ did what the law could not accomplish. Everyone becomes one in Christ.

Theological Foundations

This section discusses some of major theological concepts including *imago Dei*, the fall, sin, repentance, redemption, the priesthood of all believers, and the ecclesiological and missional perspectives of domestic abuse.

Imago Dei

From the beginning of the Old Testament, the image of God was attributed to all humanity. Both the male and female bore the image of God. Thomas Aquinas believed that image meant “whatever proceeds from in likeness to another” (M. Brown). Aquinas resolved that the image denoted a direct or indirect reference to the divine image. Agreeing with Augustine, Aquinas suggested that Christ, the exemplar, is a direct image of the divine Trinity while humanity reflected an indirect image. Montague Brown summarized Thomas’ distinction between likeness and image to bring further clarity to the term “image.” Brown stated that as a transcendental, “likeness” is shared by other creatures but only human beings are made in his image (3). Brown believes likeness conveys acts such as knowing and loving. When human beings direct their acts of knowing and loving towards God then they are more in the image of God.

God established a relationship with humanity as both man and woman had an opportunity to know God and to love him. Before the fall, Eve held an equal position with Adam subjected only to the Word of God, she was not in a subordinate role to Adam (Mattox 7). Even though women lived in a patriarchal-dominated culture, they were free to pray and worship God under the Mosaic Law (Exod. 34:14; Deut. 6:4-7, 26:10). The woman was equally an image-bearer with the man.

Greek Culture and the Imago Dei

Slowly the perception of women changed through the impact of the Greek culture and was noted in the literature. The Greek poet, Hesiod, attributed to the latter part of the eighth century, was one of few poets whose writings reflected morals. Two of his works focused on the Greek traditions and the life of the average person versus the wealthy of their society. The Hellenistic influence upon the Jewish culture was readily detected in his “Theogony” which addressed, as a warning to men, the problems associated with women (“Hesiod”). By the second century, this ideology began to influence Judaism. The Talmud contained warnings to men about the ills of women. The Talmud stated that having conversations with lots of women will lead to unchastity (Attitudes to Women).

Theological Perspectives of the Image of God

God’s decision to create man and then to have his creation assume his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26) has presented theologians and other disciplinarians an opportunity to delve into the meaning of the “image of God.” Some early scholars and philosophers like St. Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius the Areopagite, and St. Thomas Aquinas found their theological perspective of the *imago Dei* greatly influenced, in varying degrees, by Neoplatonism (“Neoplatonism”). Combining religion, philosophy, metaphysics, and the mystic was not uncommon for the early theologians, as they fought against paganism, especially concerning the themes of God, soul, and the world (“Paul Tillich” 6). Scholars still search for an understanding of the image of God.

Gregory the Great believed that humans are composed of two components, the divine breath of life and the earth (Harrison 51). This philosophical concept was derived from Platonism. Gregory believed that human beings resided in two distinct realms, the

invisible, or spiritual, which consists of “spiritual realities above the heavens,” and the earth or the material world (51). The conclusion of Gregory’s rationale for God creating humans from spiritual and natural realities lies in humans having the ability, like angelic beings, to recognize God and to give him glory even while residing on earth. Harrison noted that Miriam recognized that God delivered the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians and sang praises to God in Exodus 15:20-21 (51-63).

Believers have a responsibility to first portray that they have received the righteousness of God through their interactions with one another. Reverend David Teel, Director of Laity and Spiritual Leadership at Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church gives three components to experience a loving unified relationship. He states that each believer is called “to proclaim, grow in, and embody the good news of saving love in Jesus Christ” (Teel). The saving love in Jesus Christ leads believers to receive the message of God’s love through their relationship with Christ which becomes their testimony. Finally, the believer allows the love of God to transform them into the *imago Dei*.

Three Views of the Image of God

Historically, theologians have held three views of the image of God, the substantive, the relational, and the functional or vocational (Dancouse; Sands 30–33). The substantive view accepts the mind as superior to the body and that the image was given to humanity at creation and cannot be removed. This view is believed to be heavily influenced by the Hellenistic culture that women desired to see themselves as “female men of God” (Dancouse). Next, the relational view is existential in thought and viewed as

a dynamic occurrence that offers interrelatedness with God and one another patterning the interrelatedness of the Trinity (Dancause; Sands 34).

Finally, the functional view which Paul Sands referred to as the vocational view whereby humanity is called to a task. This view of the *imago Dei* referred to the command from God in the first chapter of Genesis and is more about the task assigned to humanity than the “nature of the *imago*” (Sands 37). The perception of the “*imago*” being more about the task than the nature of God’s image is called the royal-functional view. Ginnlaugur A. Jonsson is a theologian with a functional view perspective. He believed that the image of God resides in the dominion of humanity over creation (Jonsson 13). Deb Gregory suggested in her interview with Steve Dancause that the functional view continued to be referenced from a male perspective and she questioned where Eve fit in this analysis (Dancause).

The *Imago Dei* in Marriages

Marriages that fail to reflect the *imago Dei* and extend the love of God towards one another stand the chance of devastating their relationship and family. The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) reported that twenty percent of marriages including intimate partnerships experienced some form of assault. Their findings indicated that among “controlling abuse, called intimate terrorism, 90% of the perpetrators are male” (Domestic Violence). Whereas AAMFT asserted that to a lesser degree, the aggressive controlling pattern of abuse against the woman tended to result in criminal charges and injuries.

The *Imago Dei* and Equality

Gregory The Great believed without sin there could be no inequality. In contrast, Augustine believed that the woman was weaker than the man in strength and dignity while Aquinas retorted that the woman stands “equally with man through coition for the purpose of generation” (Aquinas, *ST.I.Q92.A1.C - Aquinas*; Aquinas, *ST.I.Q92.A1.Rep1 - 2*; Harrison 6). Augustine and Aquinas voiced the inequalities women were experiencing in society. Inequality was seen in their literature and the arts, as art mirrors the culture of an era in society (Schoot 33). Thus, women not having equality with men was demonstrated in the public and the private segments of society as well as in the arts.

Philip Groth viewed Augustine's theoretical perception of the equality of women as twofold. First Groth observed the exclusivity of humanity in Augustine's theory. In this concept, humanity has an “inner man” in which the woman is prohibited from participation and secondly, Augustine believed in shared humanity the woman has a distinct and separate role (Groth 56). Groth does not agree with Augustine's compartmentalization of what being made in the image of God meant for women. Lori Alexander writes that women share the same nature as men, but they do have distinct roles. She continued stating that men directly bring glory to God while women bring glory to God “indirectly” through their husbands (Alexander). But for Alexander, the proof that women have the same nature as men rested in the participation of women in the soteriological plan of God.

Augustine's view has been examined and some theorists believe that excluding the woman from bearing the image of God is based on a hierarchy creation ideology where God demonstrated his love on creation order. Groth's philosophy is that Augustine

based his theory on the complementarian ontology of the gendered image of God (57). In essence, the male has an outer and inner man of which the outer man is associated with temporal activity while the inner man, also called the mind, bears the image of God. Since the female came from a man she shares in the temporal activities because “the outer man supports the inner man” (qtd. in Groth 57). For Augustine, the female was an extension of the man and so she functioned as the outer man and is denoted as the helper for the male in Genesis chapter two.

Augustine took a position on why the serpent chose the woman to deceive. He believed that as the helper, the female, who lacked the inner man, did not have the wisdom of the male. Nonetheless, the female helper was a necessity as the temporal works with the non-temporal reason and intellect of the male (Groth 57-60). For Augustine, the temporal brought balance to the non-temporal. Judith Stark’s interpretation of Augustine’s philosophy is that the female having the *imago Dei* only when she is joined with the male (25, 30). Groth counteracted the human factor. The humanity of the woman placed within her the image of God. The male and the female comprise humanity, and humanity was created to bear the image of God.

The injustices humanity faces daily causes many false conceptions of the image of God. This ambiguity occurs within many segments of society. Gay rights, political views, denominational differentiation, doctrinal differences, and views on gender inequities are a few of the plethora of disagreements that emerge from the topic of being created in the image of God. The Christian community has not come to the forefront to address domestic abuse which may be connected to the woman and the *imago Dei* (Middleton, “Ethical Challenge”).

Racism goes beyond a concern for Christianity and delves into the very theology of the image of God. Karen Teel, a feminist theologian states, “Christianity has always proclaimed the image of God present in human beings,” and she continues stating that it is a long trajectory of injustice against the community of African Americans (37). Teel believes women unequally experience inequality in both white and African American communities. Teel notes the inequity women experience is not limited to geographical confines (37-39). The plight to be accepted as an image bearer occurs in Christianity and the community.

The Fall

Notwithstanding, conformity to doing the will of God is broken in what is known as “The Fall” (Gen. 3). In the Garden of Eden, the serpent deceived the woman by tempting her with gaining knowledge to be like God (Gen. 3:1-6). The deception led to an act of disobedience which brought separation, shame, and fear as Adam and Eve hid from God (3: 7-11). Albert Outler reports that John Wesley fought against the evil that rises in the quest for knowledge lest it becomes a stumbling stone (Outler 88; Ott 61). Subsequently, that which God created and deemed as good becomes the agent of corruption and destruction when engaged in ways and means that are unrequited by God. God responded to their disobedience by passing judgment. To the woman, God responded, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow, thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). The disobedience of Adam and Eve is the first occurrence of sin and continues to baffle linguists, scientists, theologians, psychologists, physicians, and other

disciplinarians concerning the effects of sin (Greenblatt 3, 4). Startling and retractable, the wages earned for original sin was death.

The act of disobedience placed the woman in submission to the authority of the man to “rule over” her (Gen 3:16b). Although a series of blaming ensued, punishment is pronounced (Gen. 3:10-16). Still, their relationship endured the trauma of their actions during the fall (Szpek 5). Scripture gave instructions for this new relationship: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). This covenant contained two Hebrew words *azab* to leave or forsake, and *dabaq* which means to cleave or to adhere to (Fruchtenbaum 88). Two of the four components Hugenberg gave to help define this unified relationship were that this is an oath and it entails an obligation to each other (215). Thus, within the relationship was a mutual responsibility to each other.

Sin

The disobedience of the human race due to the fall tended to draw attention to the initiation of sin and dismissal from the Garden by God. Jurgen Moltmann agreed with Friedrich Schleiermacher’s theology that the death of the personhood of man is a natural occurrence in the life cycle but a consciousness of God causes a fear of death (“*The Coming of God*” 88–89). Once the God-consciousness is awakened, fear sets in, and the death of the soul is viewed as punishment for sinful acts. Karl Barth agreed that death is natural, but his resolve rested in the belief that “man entered the earth as a finite being; and the *de facto* death” resulted from the fearful belief that human beings were cursed with the punishment of death for their sin (Barth 625, 632).

Henry Novello argues, that humans did not enter the earth with a negative reality of sin but with a positive reality of life (Moltmann, "*The Coming of God*" 475). Humans came into a perfect world as recorded in Scripture where God commented that all he created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Then, in an act of love, God demonstrated his providential grace as he sought out fallen "humanity" and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). Following their fall from grace, the created man and woman realized that they are naked (Gen. 3:10-11).

Sin has been defined as an act of deception that caused humanity to fall from a state of perfection or a state of innocence. Often, as seen in Genesis 3, the female receives the blame for the situation. As a result, women have low self-esteem and a sense of exaggerated humiliation, or an overstated sense of humility (McDougall). Not only does this mindset affect women, the results of this mindset play out in a society as well.

The third chapter of Genesis tells of God's response to the fall and placed Eve under the authority and rule of Adam. To the command that woman became subjected to man, Aquinas responded, "For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So, by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates" (Aquinas, *ST.I.Q92.A1.C - Aquinas*). Then, continuing with his philosophical reasoning, Aquinas surmised that in the natural order, there is a superior and a subject.

Repentance

Holy love flows from a holy God and God freely extends it to all humanity through an inner act of grace. The doctrines of repentance, faith, and holiness define the

Christian journey towards entire sanctification or perfect love from Wesley's perspective (Collins 155). God has provided a way of salvation for all who believe. John 3:16-17 reveals that by confessing faith in Christ and repenting of sins a person is purified of all unrighteousness and will have everlasting life. Repentance goes beyond saying “sorry” it involves a change of mind to accept God’s way of living which in turn leads to behavior change (Acts 26:20). Thomas C. Oden writes that there are three tenses in the vocabulary of salvation—past, present, and future—which moves the person from repentance to confessing and receiving Christ as Lord (566, 582-86). The process begins with recognizing God in their past and present. Recognizing that God is omnipresent helps a person in distress. Oden further states that the Holy Spirit gives justifying grace through Jesus Christ to sustain the Christian walk and vocation (581, 631, 667). When a person cognitively accepts the reality of God’s presence in their past and present situations, then hope can be restored for their future. For women who have suffered domestic abuse learning that it is the Holy Spirit who draws them to the love and presence of God gives them hope.

In Scripture, Jesus delivers a directive to the Israelites to repent because the kingdom of God was close (Matt. 3:2, 4:17; Mark 1:15). But the soteriological discourse was not one of separatism. Jesus’ message was inclusive of women as well. Women were included in the group waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem. It begins with the disciples who followed Jesus’ instructions “and, being assembled with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me;” (ASV, Acts 1:4). Women were present along with the disciples in the upper chamber to witness the coming of the Promise, the Holy Spirit, who would

empower them for ministry (*KJV Acts 1:1-14*). The group in the upper chamber gathered in one accord in continuous prayer. Scripture informs us that women along with Mary the mother of Jesus were included in this prayer meeting (*Acts 1:14*). When the Holy Spirit fell upon the group, they received power for ministry.

Redemption

Following the fall, strife immediately came between Adam and Eve resulting in a lack of accountability for their actions and they hid from God (*Gen. 3: 8-13*). The man and woman were no longer at peace with God nor with themselves due to their disobedience. Then, God revealed his soteriological plan of redemption. A virgin would bear a child, Jesus Christ, who would restore the relationship between God and his creation (*Gen. 3:14-15*). For Wesley, justification, and sanctification were the main principles in the *ordo salutis* or order of salvation.

Thomas Collins views transformation as a two-fold soteriological change. He noted that first, a person receives the “relative” change of justification and then, the “real” or inner soul-changing power of sanctification (170–71). This leads to the final phase where the believer who is growing in the love of God, freely gives love to another. Lain Gordon views the new life in Christ as positional. He believed that justification positions believers before God as friends versus enemies who are freed of debt and guilt because they stand in Christ. Gordon stated, “In His goodness and by His grace, God changes our standing—our position—before Him when we place our trust in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.” Justification as a means of grace was endowed to human beings by faith and procured sanctification in humanity. The emphasis rested not on

human factors instead, justification came by grace alone which restored the relationship of humanity with God.

While women were being persecuted in their homes as well as in the church, some theologians recognized this injustice and advocated for their liberation as children of God. John Wesley and John Fetter were among these theologians advocating for equality for women. Wesley believed that salvation was entirely an act of grace by God and included justification, sanctification, and glorification (Collins 161). With this understanding, that God acted alone in the process of salvation, Wesley believed that women could be used by God in ministry.

John Wesley's advocacy for women in ministry was evident in the use of women in the early development of the Methodist church (Eunjoo 86; Field). One such woman was Mary Bosanquet Fletcher who along with Sarah Ryan led a charge for the underserved and unprivileged citizens of her hometown Leytonstone in London. The charge grew in numbers but was not welcomed by the townspeople. Mary Fletcher journaled that the townspeople howled like beasts through the windows during worship services and threw dirt at the parishioners as they left service (Field). She was uncomfortable with her calling to preach but John Wesley encouraged her, noting her giftedness in the preaching ministry.

In other denominations, women were enjoying their ability to preach. Women believed that through Christ they equally received the same justification the men received through Christ. A woman's calling to preach was received by a few of their male co-laborers. Samuel Torshell who held an egalitarian view, and John Roberts strongly advocated not only the equality of women as preachers, they advocated for women to

have other rights within the church (Chilcote 14). Women wanted the opportunity to hold positions and to have a voice in the decisions of the church as well as preach.

Wesley encouraged women in their calling believing that all are justified through Christ. Excerpts from three letters Wesley wrote illustrated his compassion and pastoral love for women. The first letter Wesley sent to Dorothy Furly in 1757 stated, “Whatever enemies you have, it is enough that you have a Friend who is mightier than them all. O let Him reign in your heart alone” (“Letter to Dorothy;” Collins 161). Then on July 5, 1783, in a letter of comfort to Mrs. Jane Barton who was experiencing family illness, Wesley wrote, “The world never makes anyone happy, and it is certain it never will. But God will” (“Letter to Barton”). When Dorothy Furly became frustrated with her spiritual growth, Wesley responded to her “God is Sovereign, in sanctifying as well as justifying. He will act when as well as how He pleases, and none can say unto him, What doest Thou” (“Letter to Dorothy”). Kenneth Collins like Wesley believed that God alone justifies and gives grace to all of humanity to receive salvation and to be used in the spreading of the gospel.

Priesthood of All Believers

Paul Sands wrote that all believers are called to be vicars with a task similar to John the Baptist. As vicars, believers are called to prepare the way for God’s rule (34). Missionally, believers are representatives of God on earth. Believers, as agents are to function with power authorized by God, and they “are to share in the resources of the earth” (Middleton, “Liberating Image” 27). Thus, when God tells the man and woman to take dominion in the first chapter of Genesis, God addressed the royal function of human beings as his representatives who are authorized to exert power in spreading the gospel.

An article by World Press, Inc. stated that women were used in major revival movements such as “John Wesley and Methodism, Count Zinzendorf, and the Moravians” and even in Azusa (Dale). Women have stood as justified servants of God throughout history. Even in the early church women were sent out as preachers (Thiessen 7). As early as A. D. 659 a monastic community in the British Isles of Hilda Abbess of Whitby had women among their residents (Chilcote 11). This was not the case across the religious spectrum and inequity remains a concern in the twenty-first century. The Vatican released a statement on January 11, 2021, that was signed by Pope Francis stating that women would not be allowed in the ordained ministry of priesthood or diaconate (Povoledo). However, In Catholicism, women who are baptized are allowed to function in the readings at mass.

Ecclesiological Perspective of Domestic Abuse

The ecclesiological lens for John Wesley is rooted in Christology and a call to holiness. John Wesley believed that the church universal, also known as the church catholic, was an institution where the “word is preached, and the sacraments administered” (Collins 240). This ecumenical view of the church embodies Wesley’s and other scholars’ belief that indeed the church is an assembly of all true believers, fitly joined to Christ its head, which forms one body and has one Spirit, one Lord, one hope, one faith, one God, and one Father of all called the body of Christ (Outler 46, 51; Lathrop 2).

Cheryl Peterson viewed ecclesiology from the Pentecostal experience in the book of Acts and the ecumenical creeds. Peterson stated that the goal of the church was to assemble weekly for sharing and healing as a Spirit-filled people who then take the love

and forgiveness of God into a broken world (C. Peterson 14, 127). She noted that just as Jesus breathed on his disciples in the twentieth chapter of the gospel of John, the Spirit breathed on the church in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The church is now formed and sustained by the Word and the sacraments. Thus, through pneumatology, the church entered *missio Dei* or the mission of God sent into a world with the purpose of sharing and healing.

The lens of scholars helped in understanding the depth of ecclesiology and its intended purpose. Karl Barth's ecclesiology developed throughout his lifetime. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth emphasizes that ecclesiology cannot be comprehended solely through historical, sociological, or even phenomenological lenses. Barth emphasized the church as "the congregation of believers in a specific place and time, gathered by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, built up together into a common life of fellowship, entrusted with the task of worship, witness, and service, and sent into the world to fulfill this task" (Bender 12). Barth viewed ecclesiology theologically as a relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Domestic abuse remains a topic that the church faces. The Catholic Church has developed significant information relative to preventive measures and supportive resources. A devastating account of four Christian women who suffered abuse at the hands of their spouses or clergy relays the response of their church leadership. In one of the stories, the abuser was the pastor, who raped a parishioner who confided in him for counsel. The conclusion is that the abuse of Christian women has an impact on them, their families, and their spiritual journey, and sadly the abuser's well-being takes precedence over the survivor of abuse (Kroeger and Nason-Clark 48–49). Just as women

were silenced in the biblical accounts of sexual assaults, so were these four women who shared their stories. The church leaders advised them to keep silent about the abuse.

God made no difference between *imago Dei* in the man and woman in the beginning. Paul patterns Jesus, when he writes of women serving in the church and when he mentions and commends four women, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, and Lydia, who led home churches.

Missional

The church, as stated in the doctrinal creeds, encompasses all persons on earth who are true believers. Called to be the light in the darkness, the church heralds the gospel as a soteriological message. To ensure the gospel message goes forth, God not only left a remnant he also instituted the ordination of leaders “by the laying on of hands” (Oden 758). With Christ as its foundation, the missional function of the church as stated in the gospel of Matthew is to go and expand the kingdom of God throughout the world, telling others of his redemptive work (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, the church becomes the salvation vessel used by God.

Through ecclesiology, humanity realized the role of the church and the role God called believers to live in the church. For Schmutzer, the church has become disengaged in the discussion of domestic abuse. Pastors and church leaders have not joined the role of advocates fighting for changes within the systems of their society (Schmutzer 788). The resolution for Schmutzer rested in the unification of the church leaders with its grieving community. Although the church and the community are distinctly different, they are intrinsically connected. The difference between the church and its community posed a barrier. For Schmutzer this barrier must be dealt with in open discussion.

Research conducted on the barriers that religious beliefs bring to the topic of domestic abuse has provided significant enlightenment to the subject. One study conducted among Adventists suggested that common barriers such as fear, humiliation, lack of support, and retaliation were frequently noticed (Popescu et al 395). A significant finding was the fear associated with nuptials. Making the vow before God and man to stay together until death caused many women to stay in unsafe surroundings (Popescu et al. 395–96). In other words, the barrier of fear was present in the church.

Barriers

When internal factors or barriers were dealt with, the church would grow spiritually as well as in numbers as was seen when Paul addressed the Churches in Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor. 3:1-6; Eph. 4:1-8). These barriers are the dynamics displayed by people who were marred by sin so that they did not reflect the image of God (Roth 94-95). However, God penetrated every aspect of their character to allow the Holy Spirit to facilitate formation (Roth 95). When barriers are addressed, liturgical experience can aid in healing. The evidence of this healing was clear when women who experienced abuse and attended worship services regularly reported fewer negative emotions and were more engaged in the worship experience (Lathrop 8).

For Christian women who have deep scars from the trauma of domestic abuse, David Seamands asserts that they came to the church for healing. Instead of receiving healing, many of these women left either the same or with emotional scars from the healing attempts. Many ministers believe that the conversion experience, prayers, or being filled with the Holy Spirit will heal their embedded wounds (D. A. Seamands 9–11). David Seamands recalled the people who came to him seeking help following a failed exorcism

by an inexperienced minister with good intentions. Seamands noted that it is the Holy Spirit who brings healing. Seamands continued by referencing the apostle Paul's declaration in the eighth chapter of Romans that it is the Holy Spirit who gives healing for all the infirmities human beings experience. The woman who has suffered domestic abuse and has deep wounds and seeks God for her healing by faith will receive healing for her infirmities (D. A. Seamands 24). The Holy Spirit will lead abused women on a journey to divine healing.

Women and Trauma

Dispositional living for women in the Old Testament meant obedience to the law even at the cost of self-worth. This ideology lies in the perception that because the woman was created last and she came from the man, the woman is a weaker vessel and subordinate to the man (Kroeger and Beck 16). Under the Deuteronomic Law, the Old Testament gave numerous accounts of women who were abused physically, sexually, verbally, and emotionally. The law in Deuteronomy 21:10-14, also known as the "Pretty Girl" law was viewed as a step forward for the opponent of the feminist movement because the captured woman was not violated or brutalized as was the custom in wartime while other scholars such as Harold Washington felt that the law was a method of validating rape (Diamond 62; Washington 208; Brueggemann 216–17). Regardless of the abusive circumstances, the female survivor's value lay in being created in the image of God.

The agony women suffered from men who were to care for them and provide the customary covering as the head of the clan or family occurred far too many times. Culturally, women were possessions (Mariottini). A dowry exchange finalized the

ownership of a woman to her husband (Gen. 30:2, 34:12; Exod. 22:17). When the man lacked funds to pay the father the dowry, they worked in place of the dowry (Gen. 29:13-20, 34:11-12). The woman did not have a voice in this process, she simply submitted in obedience to the cultural norms.

While the culture of violence against women was exacerbated through systems of patriarchy, still there was a code of redemption through the community that provided a way for women who were raped to have their honor redeemed. When a man, overcome with lust, would defile a woman to satisfy a fleshly desire his offense was scrutinized and penalized. Thus, the culture dictated the honorable thing to do, when such an occurrence of violation took place, the man was to take the violated woman as his wife (Gen. 34; C. White 31; McCoy). A man who was guilty of seducing a virgin was required to marry her by paying the dowry and because she was violated by him, he could never put her away or divorce her as in the case of a normally arranged marriage (Exod. 22:16-17; Deut. 22:28). When a woman was violated and disgraced, marriage at least gave her an honorable standing within the community (Cooper-White 31-32). Community life was important for the Israelites therefore the purpose of the law was to help maintain social status.

Women Living Missionally in the Community

Dispositional living allowed the transcendence from living by situational factors to a mission focus. This act was believed to be for the good of the community. The change from responding to situational factors to becoming mission-focused represented a moral-induced behavior. Scripture models this as it gives an account of brave women who stepped forward for the greater cause of their communities.

Women in the Old Testament moved beyond communal norms, and their abusive past, and made a choice to be used by God to bless others. Rahab endangered her life to hide the two Israelite spies from the soldiers who came to kill them (Josh. 2-6). The woman captured from her native land in Israel and carried to Syria against her will, yet she moved beyond her circumstances to help her master, Naaman. Scripture refers to her as the little maid (2 Kings 5:2). She showed bravery by speaking up to help save Naaman from leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-4). Even Deborah went to battle against Sisera and God allowed her to be acknowledged for the victory (Judg. 4, 5). The missional behavior these women demonstrated constituted an ascetic lifestyle which led them to serve their community.

In the New Testament, women continued to experience inequality and abuse. Two instances of this are the Samaritan woman at the well who because of customs came to the well at an unpopular time. There she encountered Jesus and was set free from sinful ways. The Samaritan woman was so enthralled about meeting Jesus she went back to her town to share the good news. On another occasion, Jesus healed a woman while he was teaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17). The nameless woman was bent over as a result of possession by an evil spirit. In opposition to the negativity, he received for his actions, Jesus calls this woman a daughter of Abraham. For the first time in two decades, this woman can stand straight (Glahn). Regardless of customs, shame, or negative comments, Jesus changed her life.

Psychology and Cognitive Processes

Many problems existed as they related to domestic abuse. Currently, there are numerous definitions of what constitutes domestic abuse. Adding to the problem

researchers needed to define the paradoxical implication of the perpetrator's sexual motives:

Sexual motives have paradoxical implications. For instance, a person having sex without a condom can be motivated by a desire to increase his or her own physical pleasure, whereas another person can engage in the same behavior and be motivated by a need to avoid rejection from a partner. The overt behaviors are identical, but the need fulfilled is different in each case (Brousseau et al. 634).

Understanding the hidden motives of perpetrators poses a concern for all disciplines in the medical field. Sexual coercion is described as another tactic used by perpetrators to victimize. The definition of sexual coercion is coercing a person to participate in sexual activity despite their disinclination using psychological pressure and manipulation (Brousseau et al. 534; Le Poire 179–232). The tactics used in coercion may range from manipulative gestures such as lying, arguments, and even the use of force. These tactics are problematic for researchers who noted that the motivation among perpetrators may vary.

Another area that posed a problem for researchers concerned the unification of the psychometric instruments used for assessment. Better comparisons among studies are needed (Dokkedahl et al.). Numerous concerns evolved from this study such as the continued subservient perception society holds towards women. However, these concerns can be used for the development of more studies to better define domestic abuse and to determine how to better help women who were abused.

Domestic abuse may present as physical or psychological and occurs when one partner exerts control either by physical, psychological, or emotional means. The

prolonged psychological effects of domestic abuse can impact the survivor throughout their life course, even resulting in post-traumatic stress syndrome which can have devastating effects on a person's well-being and their relationship with God and with others ("Domestic Violence" | Psychology Today; Effects of Domestic Violence | Joyful Heart Foundation; Bethel 2; Cooper and Crockett). Studies need to continue on the recommended treatment for post-traumatic stress syndrome, because depression is not the only psychological disorder abused women experience.

Since trauma can have long-lasting effects, health practitioners need to inquire about the sexual activities of older women (Cooper and Crockett, 56-61). Not only does abuse in older women pose a concern for health professionals, but medical professionals may discount older women who have passed the reproductive years. The Department of Health and Human Services has limited information on older women due to the lack of data collection among this population.

Cultural barriers may prevent older women from disclosing the pressures they faced from domestic violence. Women with disabilities were another group often overlooked. The attributed cause lies in a lack of research on the dynamics of generational factors and an unwillingness to disclose (Crockett et al.; Plummer and Findley 19). Plummer and Findley conducted a study that showed that of the 1,152 women with disabilities surveyed, 54% had experienced domestic violence while only 24% had reported it (19). Their study suggested that the number of occurrences was higher and warranted care providers asking if this population was experiencing abuse.

Men and women are perpetrators. Dutton believed that by the age of fifteen a psychological assessment can determine if a person will perpetrate (Dutton, x). The rate

of intimate partner violence was approximately the same for men and women in Canada, the United States, and possibly globally (Dutton; Dokkedahl et al.). Dutton believed that his research indicated that what was formerly thought to be a feminist appeal by female survivors stating self-defense, no longer holds. Dutton believed that the research positioned women who have experienced abuse based on attitudes needed to deem someone at fault.

Researchers, as well as therapists, have discovered that when women remained silent about traumatic experiences it permeated into their lives causing shame and affecting other generations (Tamas 47; Laub 64; Eppert 64). Both Ruth Everhart and Jacqueline Grey advocate for women to have a voice to speak up for themselves. Everhart mentions several biblical accounts of women like Bathsheba who were raped, humiliated, or even killed but the authors silenced them (Everhart 23–25; Grey 13–14). Many women are not given a name in the narrative.

Sociology—Culture and Abuse

Society has offered laws for the protection of women. Still, the question remains, “Is this enough?” Author Jake Jones aligned with a professor at the Open University of Israel on the topic of the protection of women. Jones wrote it appears that the author of Deuteronomy precluded cultural behaviors from the Ancient Near Eastern laws such as Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian Laws, which stated in the twenty-second chapter of Deuteronomy that the accuser is required to present proof of the accusation (Jones 5; Edenburg). The Deuteronomic laws failed to protect the woman from the ridicule and public shame she must endure—including the forced marriage with her perpetrator from whom she can never divorce (J. J. Jones 2).

The biblical narratives of women who suffered abuse do not mention if these women received every day felt love which research links to one's well-being (Swayne). Abusive behavior may be the acceptable norm for this culture. Still, kind acts, loving words, and consoling touches offered intentionally by members of the community could help in the psychological healing process. An article published by Pennsylvania State University best explains the effectiveness of every day felt love through one's community:

Zita Oravec, assistant professor of human development and family studies and ICDS faculty believes that the love that humans experience through a sense of general, realistic concern has a greater effect on a person's well-being than romantic love (Swayne). Even something as simple as a greeting from a neighbor that occurs in a micro-moment can produce a feeling that resonates as love. Oravec describes the feeling as a sense of well-being. Although the stories of many of the women under the Old Testament laws did not share this experience often, there are such occurrences. (Swayne)

Biblical narratives do not reveal whether the communities responded or not to the abusive experiences women endured.

The behavior of the perpetrator on the health of women has been documented and it indicates that severe physical and mental disorders can occur. Intimate partner violence (IPV) caused low birth weight and increased morbidity and mortality in infants and increased the risk of "unintended pregnancy and multiple abortions in pregnant women" (Sakar 466-68). But the effects of IPV have been reported as inflicting undue stress on women. Monica Lutgendorf noted that features of IPV include physical, sexual, and

psychological abuse including controlling behavior (470-75). Women who have experienced the loss of a child due to intimate partner violence have an increased rate of long-lasting psychological consequences (Sakar 467-71).

A Christian woman who has suffered intimate partner violence has the same spiritual, physical, and emotional needs as all other believers. Dallas Willard writes of the physical training *gumnaze*, which refers to a gymnasium, in which the apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to practice (98). In First Timothy 4, Paul encouraged Timothy to practice godliness and compared it to a spiritual gymnasium (*gumnaze*) (Willard 98). In making this statement, Willard believes that *gumnaze* or spiritual gymnasium was a discipline that when practiced strengthens one's relationship with Christ and plays a special role in the believer's present life and future life experiences.

Spiritual Formation for Abused Women

The development, practice, and sustainability of a disciplined life—lived in humble submission to the Holy Spirit's guidance of spiritual practices for transformation—is a principle called a rule of life. A synopsis of Reginald Johnson's elaborate definition of a Rule of Life presented a summary of goals and visions that would aid in the development of a faithful walk with God (79). Johnson noted that the words "faithful walk with God" defined the morality of a person's character (79). The person's morality purposely influenced their behavior.

Scripture Reading

Although the bible admonishes humanity to study the Scripture, reading Scripture posed gender issues. The gender issue did not affect women in the sense of women not being allowed to read the Bible privately. The disclosure was that churches

in the twenty-first century believe that only men should read the Word of God in a teaching setting (Challies). The men were well equipped with viable techniques for studying Scripture by mentors.

Scripture reading without the inclusion of other modes of spiritual disciplines can lead to a one-sided spirituality (Mulholland " 73). One suggested model to consider from the review was the amalgamation of other spiritual disciplines. Incorporating other methods of contemplation may present a greater challenge to one's spirituality but will help to bring balance. Meditation and reflection may be incorporated with the reading of Scripture.

Silence/Solitude

One spiritual discipline not frequently taught in Christianity is the practice of silence or solitude, yet it is a biblical principle. Scripture denoted Jesus separating from his disciples and the crowd of people that occasionally surrounded him to be alone or by himself (Matt. 14:13, 23; Mark 1:45, 3:7, 13, 6:46; Luke 5:15-16, 6:12-13, 9:10).

Ester Buchholz's article, "The Call of Solitude," in *Psychology Today* presented information on spending time alone for various health reasons and spiritual connection with God. Terminologies such as anchoring and centering appeared in the literature. These terms alluded to the practice of quieting oneself to reduce the stress of the systems of the body (Buchholz). However, quieting the systems of the body was not the only benefit of practicing the spiritual discipline of solitude. Although the health benefits and learning to be at peace with oneself without feeling lonely is beneficial, in addition, there is a spiritual connotation to practicing solitude (Buchholz).

A Sufi practice called *khalvat* surfaced indicating the universality of practicing solitude (Malik). The word *khalvat* means solitude. The research suggested that this practice created space for silencing one's mind or creating positive thoughts. This is a Muslim belief for assisting in experiencing God. This was a journey undertaken in the search for an experience with God (Malik). The search for God is a venture undertaken by other religious beliefs.

Benedict, a sixth-century reformer from Nursia, Italy, renounced the licentious life in Rome and move to "live in solitude in a cave at Subiaco" for approximately three years (Fry 10). While there, Benedict encountered a religious experience that changed the trajectory of his formation and he more fervently sought after developing a virtuous character. Choosing an ascetic life requires discipline even during persecution and Dorotheos accepted the challenge and served in a monastery in pursuit of a holy lifestyle. The pursuit of a contemplative lifestyle taught Dorotheos that patience, suffering, and humbly submitting to authority for spiritual direction brought glory to God (Wheeler, 61). Bernard's aristocratic upbringing was not only prolific, but it also taught him moral values which led him to develop the monasteries of Clairvaux where other monks could be trained to practice solitude (4, 11). For Spener, his commitment to practicing spiritual disciplines guided him throughout his life. He maintained this perspective of habitus as the means for godliness (25). Each of these great men shared a common factor like John Wesley, which was the influence of a godly mother who instilled in them a desire for a lifestyle of holiness.

Prayer

Prayer is a concept a person does but may not have words to adequately convey a conceptual account of the meaning of prayer if asked. D. Z. Phillips wrote that a scientist does science but may not explain scientific statements well or a novelist writes but may not know literature, so a person may pray and not be able to explain what prayer means (2). Phillips affirms his belief that giving an account of religious activity with a philosophical concept may be difficult by quoting Augustine's Confession:

For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it; we understand also, when we hear it spoken of by another. What then is the time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not? (Bk, xi: xiv; qtd. in Phillips 2).

Prayer has a prominent place in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In the Old Testament, we find women who prayed in times of need. The story of Hagar is of a broken woman who prayed for God's help and received it (Gen. 16:1-16). Sarai told Hagar to be a mistress to her husband Abram. Sarai was barren and she wanted Hagar to bear Abram a child. Then out of anger and jealousy, Sarai began treating Hagar badly because Hagar taunted Sarai about being pregnant by Abram. Finally, Hagar ran away. While sitting near a spring crying an angel visited her saying that Hagar's prayer had been heard and God would help her (Gen. 16:7-12). Hagar is one of many women who trusted God to deliver them from demanding situations.

The prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel is one prominent figure to portray the value placed on praying to Yahweh. Anna was an older woman and a widow who spent her days alone in the temple praying and fasting (Luke 2:36-7). Her acts in the temple were viewed as serving God. Fasting is often combined with prayer in Scripture.

Esther engaged in which discipline of fasting when she needed to hear from God (Esth. 4:16). Esther called the community to join her in prayer and fasting as she pursued the release of her people from an ill-begotten plot for the annihilation of the Jews.

Karl Barth wrote about the importance of prayer through the Reformation which was a period of revolt against the corruption in the church. Barth saw the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer noting that when believers say this prayer God replies in the affirmative (7). In his book *Prayer* Barth credits Martin Luther with being a forerunner in this movement. The Reformation resulted in Christian Reform and Protestantism was birthed. Barth referred to this period as a time when believers continued in prayer and invocation and God responded (5). The Lord's Prayer continues to be memorized and recited as a congregational prayer.

Unity in Community

Feminist advocates like Mickey L. Mattox and Ruth Everhart aware of gender disparities believed that women also bear the *imago Dei* and thus are valuable to God and society. As advocates, they believed that domestic abuse and inappropriate sexual acts towards women are not the only areas displaying disparities. Women were pressed to remove gender-based limitations. Women have made history as they shattered previous limitations placed on them even in the presence of abuse. In the previous decade of the

twenty-first century, women have made noteworthy progress in breaking social barriers by grouping in unity to form a strong support base.

The online magazine “Ellevest” published some major accomplishments women have made in the decade from 2010 to 2019. A few of the notable achievements were.

August 7, 2010, Elena Kagan was sworn into the US Supreme Court; July 13, 2013, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tomet founded the Black Lives Matter movement; August 31, 2013, at age 64, Diana Nyad was the first person to swim from Cuba to Florida without a cage; July 29, 2016, Hillary Clinton accepted Democratic nomination making history as the first woman presidential nominee from a major party; and then on November 6, 2020, Kamala Harris, the first woman, and first minority woman nominee for Vice President from a major party won the election as Vice President. (Krawcheck).

Ellevest highlighted other major accomplishments by females in many other disciplines. These women have experienced challenges and abusive situations still, they advocate for their place within the community.

The unified Christian community is called to portray the communal unity seen within the Trinity. The Trinitarian relationship is intricate at best and gives a picture of the multi-layered, multi-faceted relationship expected of humanity. Moltmann believes that God in and of himself portrays community. Moltmann further asserts, If we cease to understand God monotheistically as the one, absolute subject, but instead see him in a trinitarian sense as the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we can then no longer, either conceive his relationship to the world he has created as a one-sided relationship of domination” (*God in Creation* 1–2).

Jesus witnessed the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the Gospel of John when in his final days with the disciples spoke of how it was expedient for him to go so that the Comforter could come (John 14:7). As the Advocate, the Holy Spirit enables humanity to live in communal unity.

The media such as television, newspapers, and even the internet, revealed the division over differences in ideologies and philosophies within the Christian communities (Geoff, “Christian Denominations;” Harris). These controversial topics, ranging from pastors of mega ministries involved in licentious acts to divisive subjects within denominations, are heralded on social media, newspapers, and television.

The controversies surrounding racism and created in the “image of God” are felt throughout society. Within the African American community, the fight for equality as representatives of the “image of God” continues.

Racism pervades both society and religion, including Christian churches. Neither the secular belief in human equality—‘all men are created equal’—nor the Christian teaching that all are created in God’s image has prevented this evil...Secular laws and mainstream religious doctrines now declare the equality of all people, yet racism is still a huge problem (K. Teel 2).

Racism and equality for women continue to pose problems in the twenty-first century.

The controversy within the Christian community is not something new. In the early church, the Jewish community, and the Gentile community experienced contention. Ferdinand Christian Baur writes about the conflict between the Jewish Christians or *Judenchristentums* and the Gentile Christians or *Heidenchristentums*. Baur surmised the more the Gentile church thrived, the greater the divide between the two Christian groups

(128). Terance Donaldson notes that the lack of unity continued throughout the development of the early church (433).

Paul dealt with the need for unity within the Christian community. Bauer saw Paul as a model to pattern after (128). Paul said that he was called to the Gentiles but the Jewish Christians wanted to maintain Christianity within the confines of the Jewish culture. Paul addresses this type of division within the body of Christ in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Whether Jew or Gentile, Christians are called to live a unified life since there is one body serving one Lord. Paul also addresses division in the early church in 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:23. Paul defends his argument with the use of Scripture to encourage spiritual growth (Maloney; Williams 317). Unity in the church body signifies spiritual growth (Eph. 4:1-6).

The Sacraments as Means of Grace

In the Protestant faith, there are two sacraments Jesus Christ participated in baptism (Luke 3:16-22) and Communion (1 Cor. 11:21-25). These two sacraments were instituted by Christ by the grace of God. John Wesley spoke of the means ordained by God as channels of his grace (Wesley, "Means of Grace"). The sacraments are often referred to as outward acts of an inward work. In his sermon, Wesley wrote of the inward renewing work in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. Thereby, man is transformed into the image of God. Believers are reminded that Jesus died, was buried, and rose for the salvation of humanity. Grace is not earned by works instead it must be freely received from God by faith (Rom. 5:15).

The Sacrament of Communion

Communion is a reminder that believers have come into a relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrament of communion was not about coming to the table for bread and wine (I Cor. 11:17-22). Nor should the ritual or the method of taking communion become the focus. Instead, “communion celebrates the Gospel: Jesus was broken for us so that we can be fixed by Him” (“What Is Communion”). Scripture gives an account of communion as a practice instituted by Jesus with his disciples as portrayed in 1 Corinthians 11.

In a world divided by a plethora of ideologies, the sacrament of communion may offer hope. The United Methodist Church has faced many divisions in its history and the Holy Communion presents an opportunity for unity. The reconciliatory ritual has brought people with different views together throughout the history of Methodism (Fuerst). Communion is a time to come together and remember Jesus and the cross.

The Sacrament of Baptism

A statement on the website of Lifeway, a Christian resource company, stated, “Baptism translates baptisms, the meaning in the act of baptism, namely, a symbol of what Jesus did to save us – death, burial, and resurrection – and what He does in the believer – death to the old life, its burial, and resurrection to a new life in Christ” and is symbolic rather than a necessity for salvation” (“Significance”). The term baptismal regeneration surfaced around the late second century and early third century (“What the Early”). The term baptize carries the belief that the ideology of baptismal regeneration negated the pouring or sprinkling of water because immersion is the original method used for baptism in the New Testament accounts (Matt. 3:5; Mark 1:5; Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12).

Baptism is symbolic of what the apostles taught and that it was the belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that positions the believer “in Christ” (“The Significance”).

Theologian Don Samdahl summarizes Paul’s theology of baptism by denoting from 1 Corinthians that the believer receives new life through being baptized into the body of Christ. He writes that Paul uses baptism as a metaphor for how God views the believer as being buried with Christ and in union with Christ through his resurrection (Samdahl). Thus, the conclusion is the believer has a new life in Christ. The believer is dead to the inclination to sin which was the sinful nature of Adam and is free to go and live a Christian life.

Relationship with the Holy Spirit

Shifts in one’s relationship with God can be the result of a loss of love. Furthermore, such a loss can result in a feeling of not belonging, loneliness, and a myriad of other feelings. Another factor that surfaced was how dynamics can stimulate a shift in a personal relationship with God resulting in a feeling of shame (Tamas 4). This can also affect the divine image of God within a person. Man’s truth of the love of God and his relations to God became distorted after the fall noted in Genesis 3. The Holy Spirit can help in the restoration of the relationship between God and his creation. It is the Holy Spirit who aids in bringing a person to an understanding of the reality of the love of God.

A renewing power of the Word is the Holy Spirit at work manifesting the divine image of God in man. This is an aspect of God’s image that manifests as freedom and spiritual perception. Freedom to choose to receive truth and freedom to accept the image of God in themselves as a reality. Thus, the summation of the research in this area

indicated that a wounded person can be made whole through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The perspective of Thomas Oden depicted the Spirit as being equal to God and worthy to be worshipped. He believed this was an important message to relay to a wounded person who may be devastated by the evils of the world, such as rejection and a negative perception of self-worth. The hope found in Oden's message can offer the reassurance of the love of God. The greatness of God's love is demonstrated in the person of the Holy Spirit whose role on the earth enables humans to fulfill God's purpose for their lives. The Holy Spirit is the one who manifests the power of God on the earth. The power that enables salvation, healing, and deliverance is to be revealed in the lives of human beings.

Just as the Spirit was active in the creation and the life of Christ, he can be just as active in the lives of human beings, regardless of whether they are on the mountaintop or in the valley. Oden wrote that by the word of God, through the Holy Spirit, God is active in the life of the believer from the time of their new birth until their final restoration; working through the Spirit, God "touches, meets, and indwells within the human spirit" (531). When a person witnesses the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it is a personal demonstration of the love of the Triune God which can give hope that God cares and will work to heal the wounds of brokenness.

God has enabled women to serve others through the power of the Holy Spirit. From ancient Israel to modern-day Christianity, women have been used in various roles in every segment of society. The Holy Spirit was given to every believer as an enabling agent to help believers live a Christian life and also to "participate in the glory of the age

to come” (Gordon). Jesus openly received women as disciples in his earthly ministry denoting the richness we receive in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit can actively use men and women (Gordon; Borland; Scholer). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, women continue to serve the kingdom.

Adult Learning

The ability to live holy and in unity within one’s community does not come automatically. Educators believe there is a process a person goes through to learn how to share the love of God (D. Teel; Wright 235). Local and global marketplace did not share in the Christian’s belief in a single transcendent God. The Christian view of God did not align with the evils of the world. Missionally, this caused a confrontation because Christians are called to be different from the world.

Educators believed that the five assumptions that relate to the “characteristics of adult learners” developed in 1980 by Malcolm Knowles remained relevant today for adult eLearning courses (29-31; Pappas “9 Tips”). In a technologically savvy society, the interactive use of electronic devices enhances learning. The inclusivity of other approaches in the traditional learning environment has also proved effective. Strategies with evidence-based results for use are peer instructions, group-directed discussions, and systems like webinars (Harden and Laidlaw; Nelson et al.). The automated response systems allow the student to be engaged in the learning process.

The term “andragogy” is a Greek term that means “man-leading” (D. Peterson). The term has become synonymous with the term adult learners. Scholars like Castaneda believe that adult learners needed to unlearn what their life experiences have taught them.

He contended that adult learners approach educational materials with their nuances which may account for the myriad of educational information available for adults.

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles is a major voice in the field of andragogy known for his four principles concerning andragogy (Knowles 29-31). First, Knowles' four principles involved adults in the planning and evaluation processes; next, experiences, including successes and failures, were the basis for their learning; third, adults were prone towards learning that moves from postponing the immediacy that impacted both their personal and professional life; finally, adult learning was viewed as being more problem-centered than content-oriented because adults bring life-lessons to the learning field (Cercione 137; Pappas "Genesis 1-11;" Castaneda). Having various learning models to integrate into the learning process is important for adult learners.

Teaching and Learning

One theory surrounding learning suggests that learning occurs best through experiences and practices. Effective discipleship leads to spiritual growth. . One such theory about learning is that "educational scholars invite educators to consider the possibilities that, when learners feel heard; when their experiences, knowledge, and intuition are affirmed; and when they know their voice matters, the result is the joy of co-creating collaborative leadership and learning environments" (Etmanski et al.). These educators believed that when learning is based on one's experiences, opportunities, experiential learning occurs.

Learning opportunities are enhanced when it concludes with opportunities for self-reflection. The internal process of self-reflection opened a path for spiritual formation. Theologians such as John Wesley and Martin Luther viewed their

commitment to spiritual formation as directly impacting their ability to hear from God. Emerging theorists continue developing the contextualization of self-reflection on adult learning as it related to external factors such as patriarchal ideology (Etmanski et al. 6). Educators interested in feminist leadership will find connectivity for adult learners between reflective learning and a feminist approach to learning and its impact on collaborative leadership.

One theologian and educator notarized for his accomplished work on learning theories for spiritual formation is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer believed that practicing spiritual principles such as forgiving is “no small feat” (180). Neil Holm believed Bonhoeffer’s work heavily influenced discipleship and the missional call of the church to the community (160). Spiritual formation can be explained through the formative field model of Adrian van Kaam (Letterman et al. 27). The formative field by von Kaam represented the interactions between a person and the world, acquaintances, self, and Christ. The field, as described flows from the outer limits inward to the core or center.

The perspective of formation is embedded in everyday life. Scholars stated that formation may be experienced internally, communally, situationally, and through events and interactions on their transformative journey to holistic spirituality (Letterman et al. 21–22; Barton 16; R. Johnson 27). At the center of the formative field is Christ from whom the interconnectedness of our world and the dynamics of our being cannot be separated. Jesus’ offering of spiritual direction to the Samaritan woman in the gospel of John 4 is a key example for Christian leaders to understand the importance of being sensitive to the Holy Spirit in leading disciples.

Intergenerational Education

Theologians and Christian educators can observe Jesus' role as a teacher and mentor to better understand adult learning. Jesus incorporated experiential learning and teaching with his disciples. The Sermon on the Mount depicted Jesus standing amid the crowds teaching from the Scriptures (Matt. 7:1-29). Jesus sent out seventy disciples. Jesus grouped the disciples in two's and sent them into the various cities (Matt.10; Mark 6:7-13). Jesus demonstrated the effectiveness of a classroom setting and mentorship.

Scripture revealed the patient mentoring of Jesus, by guidance, teaching, and training as the disciples surrendered to the process of spiritual formation (Matt. 10:5-15; Mark 6:1-13; Luke 9:1-6). It portrays the disciples as having a virtuous character that impacted their spiritual direction even during demanding situations. Jesus' mentoring may also indicate that the relevancy of their transformation to a life of holiness continued to influence lives. Early church reformers like Benedict, Dorotheos, Bernard, and Spener, willingly gave up the pleasures of life and humbly surrendered to spiritual direction from their mentors.

Children were present at Jesus' teachings as noted in the Gospels, demonstrating the model of incorporating children in the learning process. Jesus included children in his healing ministry as recorded in the Gospels (Mark 10:15; John 4:46-52). During many of his teaching sessions, Jesus referred to the demeanor of a child to reference a point. For instance, Jesus spoke of emulating the qualities of a child as an important characteristic for entering the kingdom of God (Matt. 18:2-4). Utilizing the practices of Jesus the church can enhance the disciple-making process for intergenerational learners. The

church must look to each parishioner to be a disciple. And then, in turn, each parishioner must become a disciple-maker.

Lectures in Learning Experiences

Educators noted that lectures continued to be a popular model in learning experiences including its use in the medical field (Montague Brown et al.). The consensus among educators is that lectures remain a stable method of delivering valuable information, particularly in the hands of a skilled instructor. Still, there are barriers to this model such as having a disconnect between the student's life experiences and the material being taught. Implementing strategies to the barrier of variations in the lecture models can transform it from a passive format to a dynamic model that presents opportunities for student interaction and sensory stimulation (Palis and Quiros). Despite the barriers, lectures continue to be an inexpensive way to convey knowledge to large groups.

Group Dynamics

Groups existed from the beginning of time. Human beings belong to all manners of groups. People formed groups of three or more people who interacted face-to-face and shared a common interest (Tasca). From couples, shoppers, and employees at work, to large gatherings, or children at play, groups are formed throughout the life of a person.

Dynamic is a Greek word that means strong or energetic (Brown). Group dynamics is defined as "the influential interpersonal process that occurred in and between groups over time" (Forsyth 17). Interestingly, philosophers and scholars advocated for the value of groups while other scholars believe group success depends on building trust

(Forsyth 27; *“Improving Group Dynamics”*). Group dynamics can build or destroy a group.

The leader and the participants can contribute to the breakdown of a group. Common concerns revealed in the research were barriers to a healthy group. The barriers included weak leadership and communication (Kachigan). The literature supported ways to prevent group breakdown. The suggested methods were (1) know your team, (2) tackle problems quickly with good feedback, (3) define roles and responsibilities, (4) break down barriers, (5) focus on communication, and (6) pay attention (*“Improving Group Dynamics”*). A leader must know the group and intervene quickly to maintain the effectiveness of the group.

Research Design Literature

The research design of this project required a qualitative method of research. Qualitative methods are comprised of material and interpretive practices (Lincoln and Denzin iv). A qualitative method entails a process of “observing, describing, and understanding” data but may pose problems in the analysis stage of interpreting the data (Camic et al. ix–x; Sensing 194–95). Qualitative methods of research allow for the quest and comprehension of subjective data. Stated differently, it involves looking at the experiences of participants in a research study for analysis and interpretation of data.

Creswell defines qualitative research as a phenomenon of a participant’s response to questions. He states, “an inquiry approach that is used to explore and understand a central phenomenon where participants’ responses to broad, general questions are in the form of words or images and are analyzed for descriptions and themes” (Creswell 645).

Then, using a schema method of interpretation will allow the researcher to step back and think about what the information means.

Qualitative methodological exigencies must rely on more than theory, it must consider the moral and political practices of society. The combination of the quantitative and the qualitative methods helps to expand the information gathered and the analysis of the collected data and it helps the researcher to gain a greater level of understanding of the difference between quantitative and qualitative research (Glesne 14; Creswell 203; Camic et al. 4). The resolution is that the difference is greater than whether to administer a questionnaire or to conduct a personal interview.

Summary

The abuse of women is an age-old problem that has gravely affected women and their families. But, communities, societies, and the world at large have also been affected. This devastating impact of violence against women is monumental and its damaging effects extend to future generations. Therefore, it is imperative to gain a perspective on this malady by using an interdisciplinarian approach.

This chapter focused on the abuse of Christian women from various viewpoints. The chapter explored the biblical, theological, ecclesiological, psychological, and sociological implications of the abuse of Christian women both historically and in the context of postmodernity. Additionally, adult learning was investigated in an attempt to understand patterns of thought that relegate the value, worth and human dignity of women.

While many forms of abuse of women are prevalent and worthy of attention, domestic abuse was the specific focus of this research. Subsequently, domestic abuse was

selected as the topic because of the plethora of information surrounding the subject. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that domestic abuse is also known as intimate partner violence (IPV). One in four women experience IPV, and it affects over eleven million women. Countless family members generationally, societal institutions, and systems have been negatively impacted.

The literature review begins with a biblical foundation that analyzes the historical perspective of biblical women as it relates to abuse. The result of the review showed women whose voices were never heard in abusive situations. Women like the concubine who was raped all night and found dead the next morning are among the women who were silenced in abusive situations (Judges 19-21). Esther's voice was silenced when she was taken from her family as a young woman for the pleasure of the king (Esther 2). An analysis of the New Testament reveals that Jesus showed compassion and dignity to women whom society discounted as not worthy and shunned in public areas.

The literature review continued looking at the abuse of women from the perspective of several disciplines such as psychology, adult learning, and sociology. Understanding the psychological behavior of adults impacts how people learn and their behavior (Fernald 12). The results of the review showed that the patriarchal system of the Old Testament set a tone for viewing women as weaker vessels (Kroeger and Beck 16). Such ideologies resulted in inequalities for women which continue to plague women in the twenty-first century.

Christian women, as with all women, encounter disparities in a myriad of situations, including domestic abuse. Often these disparities are the experiences of a dominating figure displaying anger, control, and a host of other behaviors. The viewpoint

that a woman was the cause of sin entering the world through the fall from grace is not isolated to biblical or theological experiences. The result of the mindset that women are not equal to men and that women are the weaker gender continues to plague society.

Consequently, the literature review indicated a need for further advocacy on behalf of women in all sectors of society. Next, as an act of empowerment, women must know that in Christ God loves them equally to men (John 3:16). Then, because of this knowledge, women should not allow themselves to be silenced. Women need to speak up and not shy away from stating their opinions when placed in a male-dominated situation. Also, women must be mindful that they can develop barriers that hinder transformation stemming from the experience of domestic abuse such as low self-esteem and fear. Finally, women ought to encourage each other through supportive efforts. Listening to each other's stories and sharing their individual experiences, may mean sharing in the care of one another's children for a "mom's self-care day" or taking time for spiritual renewal are a few practical ways that women can support other women as well as participate in the process of personal healing and the healing of other women.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter three focuses on the in-depth format of the research design applicable to this project. The delineation of the methodology begins by defining the nature and purpose of the project and the numerous ways the research investigated the research questions. The research questions were matched with sections of the respective purpose statement. This included a more detailed report on the instrumentation used pertinent to the corresponding research questions along with a discourse on the ministry context in which the project occurred. The discussion includes specific information about the participants and the method of collecting and analyzing the data.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

This project emerged from a desire to see Christian women who have suffered from domestic abuse in silence grow spiritually as disciples of Christ. Domestic abuse often occurred at the hands of a husband or significant other. This population attended worship services regularly and many were continually active in ministries. Yet, many of these Christian women, out of fear, remained silent; refused to advocate for rights; or respond to the call of God.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, among adult Christian women from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community who have suffered abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

Research Questions

The following research questions served to direct this project in assessing the participant's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living respectively:

Research Question #1 What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, were identified before the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

To conduct a proper assessment, data collected prior to the eight-week experience provided a guideline to evaluate the spiritual transformation before the intervention. The participants electronically completed a Discipleship for Leaders Pre-Intervention Survey (SD Pre-S) in which questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 16, and 23 dealt with the knowledge of the participants in regard to biblical theology; questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, 25, and 26 addressed holy love by assessing the attitude feature of the participants; and questions 2, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 27 dealt with dispositional living by analyzing data pertaining to the behavior of the participants.

Research Question #2. What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, were identified following the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who have suffered domestic abuse?

To conduct a proper assessment, data collected following the eight-week experience provided a paradigm to evaluate the spiritual transformation after the intervention. Participants electronically completed a Discipleship for Leaders Post-

Intervention Survey (SDPost-S). The survey questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 16, and 23 dealt with the knowledge aspect of RQ #2, questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, 25, and 26 addressed the attitude feature of RQ #2, and questions 2, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 27 dealt with the behavior aspect of RQ #2.

Research Question #3. What aspect of the eight-week experience of spiritual direction had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation among the participants?

This question sought to ascertain qualitative information that extended the scope beyond that of the data obtained through quantitative methods. To accomplish this, the participants were asked to keep a Discipleship for Leaders Journal during the spiritual direction sessions. The journals provided opportunities to record personal thoughts, observations, and actions. The Discipleship for Leaders Journal contained one-question prompts from each spiritual direction session to aid in recording pertinent information. In addition, a focus group discussion using semi-structured questions obtained the participants' insights, observations, and thoughts.

Ministry Context

The geographical setting for this project is the city of Orangeburg, South Carolina. Orangeburg is in what is known as the Midlands of the state. This small city was established as a township in 1735 and is nestled between the cosmopolitan college city of Columbia and the historical city of Charleston. Orangeburg is known as Garden City because of the beautiful Edisto Gardens that lie along the Edisto River. As the principal city in Orangeburg County, the city of Orangeburg is the county seat.

The United States Census Bureau records the population of Orangeburg County as 84,223 as of April 1, 2020, which has declined from 92,501 as recorded on April 1, 2010 (“Quick facts”). According to the Census Bureau, the city of Orangeburg has also seen a decline in population from 13,964 in 2010 to 12,903 in 2018, as reported in their quick facts. The population decline was seen in every ethnic group except African Americans which has seen a 1.3% increase. City leaders attribute the decline in the population partly to the lack of industrial advancement and social activities for young families which have negatively impacted the economy. According to the 2020 Census, the city has a greater number of African Americans 76.43% versus 16.9% for whites. Hispanics or Latinos are 1.96% and Asians are 2.09% of the population while Native Americans and Pacific Islanders are less than 1%.

The weather in South Carolina is conducive to various outdoor activities throughout the year. The average winter temperature is in the mid-50s. Although the area may have hurricanes and storms, it continues to be a tourist attraction because of its historical significance, weather, and dining options. Sitting on the eastern coast allows for cruise ships, imports and exports, and water sports to be a few of its many attractions for locals and tourists. The city of Orangeburg has seen a recent increase in industries coming to the area.

Orangeburg has many interesting cultural facets. The Edisto Gardens is a top 20 attraction in South Carolina. An annual Festival of Roses held at Edisto Gardens brings together people from across the nation to patronize local shops, taste the southern cuisine, and enjoy the beauty of 175 acres and approximately 4800 roses on the banks of the Edisto River. Orangeburg has an African American museum founded by nationally

recognized photographer, Cecil Williams. The Blue Bird Theater established in 1941, provides socialization. Orangeburg also has a beautiful golf course at the Orangeburg Country Club. The golf course has received high ratings from the South Carolina Golf Course Rating Panel. Another major feature is the Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center which highlights the artistry of the locals.

Some of the local churches in the community are viewed as “high churches. This title is attributed to their orthodox methods of worship along with the number of college graduates and professionals among their congregants. Many of the larger churches are also visible when it comes to activities that impact on the greater community. This includes offering vaccinations, health screenings, exercise classes, hosting educational workshops and seminars, and offering soup kitchens. The majority of the mainline churches in the area remain segregated demonstrating the degree of the racial divide.

The community is active in cultural activities which include a theater, concert hall, and social activities provided by many of the community agencies. However, many of the social activities are designed for an older audience. Students attending the local universities often travel to nearby Columbia for social activities. Meanwhile, a recent COVID Pandemic placed a halt on the developmental plans for a plaza with restaurants, a theater, and a bowling alley. Efforts to bring racial unity are ongoing through its cultural activities.

The city of Orangeburg has four colleges. Two of the colleges, Claflin University and South Carolina State University (SCSU), are both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). One factor that contributed to the racial tension between the African American community and the white community occurred on the campus of South

Carolina State University when a civil rights demonstration became racially charged. Three African American males were shot by South Carolina State Troopers on the campus of South Carolina State University on February 8, 1968. This horrific event is known as the Orangeburg massacre. The other two colleges are Southern Methodist College and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College. The South Carolina Census Bureau reports that as of April 1, 2019, 20% of this small community had a bachelor's degree or higher ("Quick Facts").

Claflin University hosts an annual Christmas Concert, a Presidential Gala, and a First Lady's Hats and Gloves Tea which are all attended by several ethnic groups. Claflin University opened a Social Justice Center in downtown Orangeburg in 2020 to aid in racial reconciliation and the reduction of crime. The community hospital, the Regional Medical Center, also hosts an annual gala to raise funds for its breast care center. This gala is well attended by all ethnic groups from the community.

Demonstrating family support is an important way of life for residents of Orangeburg. On weekends, families enjoy the community parks. Families can be seen shopping, dropping children off at school, and participating in community events. The sports games of the local high school and SCSU are heavily supported by the African American community. On March 30, 2021, the city of Orangeburg proudly announced a new sports complex built for local sports leagues.

The city of Orangeburg is not only divided racially it also has deep political party concerns. Like the majority of South Carolina, Orangeburg is a conservative evangelical city with notable disparities between the African American and the white communities. Politically, the ethnic divide is visible as party signs line lawns during elections.

Although the community has been predominantly African American, the mayor has always been white except for an African American female who served on the city council and was installed as Mayor Pro Temp at the death of the mayor in 2016. The election of Orangeburg's first African American male mayor resulted in fear of unfair treatment among the white community. However, the newly elected mayor voiced his intentions to represent every person in the community. The other political offices have consistently had a higher number of African Americans serving.

Participants

To be eligible to participate in this research project, specific criteria were identified. The criteria included personal characteristics as well as moralistic features.

Criteria for Selection

Adult Christian women ages eighteen and over from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community who have suffered abuse were invited to attend the eight-week experience of spiritual direction. An invitation was extended to adult Christian women ages eighteen and over because the selected age range allowed the adult Christian women to give consensus for inclusion in the project. (See Appendix F.) In addition, some of the topics discussed such as intimate relationships with a significant partner may have been against the Christian values of some Christian parents.

Description of Participants

All of the participants were female, and their ages ranged from 18 to over 60 years of age, with 60% of participants between 40-49 years old. Further demographics of the participants are: 1. Race/Ethnicity – 60% identified as Black/African American and 40% as white; 2. Relationship Status – 40% identified as single, 20% married, 20%

widowed, and 20% divorced; and 3. Parent or Legal Guardian Status – 80% indicated they were not a parent or legal guardian, and 20% indicated that they were a parent or legal guardian. Participants reported being a Christian for between 6 and 43 years with 60% identifying as Protestant. The participants engaged in leadership roles within their specific churches which included church administration, church trustee, church treasurer, youth leader, and music minister. Two of the five participants indicated that they retired from their careers, one was a nurse and the other a supervisor for a child development agency. Two other participants were housewives. The last participant was an administrator at a University in South Carolina.

Ethical Considerations

I was approved after a full board review by the internal review board of Asbury Theological University, Then an invitation was sent electronically to seven churches in the city of Orangeburg. The seven churches in the city of Orangeburg received an electronic invitation to participate in the research project. The reason for selecting the seven churches was because they had a membership of 100 or greater. A mid-size church provided a greater pool of potential participants. Churches from the two majority ethnic groups, African American and White, received an invitation although inclusion in the project was open to any ethnicity.

Women from other churches who did not receive an invitation were free to attend. The invitation encouraged the recipient to invite other women who fit the criteria. Participants were residents of the Orangeburg City community. However, some of the zip codes in Orangeburg City include rural areas. The senior pastors distributed the invitation to their congregation. The project design specified that participants should be Christians

due to the baseline knowledge necessary to complete the research instruments and for adherence to the purpose and reliability of the project.

To allow for uniformity among the participants, the invitees included only those who were in good physical and mental health but suffered domestic abuse by their significant partner. Domestic abuse differs in its occurrence while affecting many aspects of a woman's life. Domestic abuse by an intimate partner may appear as sexual, psychological, and emotional. The National Center for Biotechnology Information reports that sexual abuse occurs in heterosexual women as well as women with a same-sex partner. The Centers for Disease Control reports that approximately 1 in 10 women experience domestic abuse by an intimate partner which includes rape.

Instrumentation

The following four instrumentations used in this research were developed by the researcher:

- (1) Discipleship for Leaders Quantitative Pre-Intervention Survey (SDPre-S in Appendix A),
- (2) Discipleship for Leaders Quantitative Post-Intervention Survey (SDPost-S in Appendix B),
- (3) Journals (SDJ Qualitative Document Analysis in Appendix C), and
- (4) Focus Group Interview Questions (see Appendix D).

The SDPre-S consisted of twenty-seven questions that participants answered two weeks before the first session. It contained two parts. The first section utilized fixed questions to obtain demographic information. The second part, questions 1 through 27, provided quantitative data utilizing a four-point Likert scale and ranged from "strongly

agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.” The SDPre-S ascertained information concerning the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior concerning biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living of the participants before the spiritual direction encounter. The platform for this online survey was Survey Monkey.

The SDPost-S assessed changes in attitudes, behavior, and knowledge as it relates to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living following the eight-week experience of spiritual direction. The Survey Monkey administered post-intervention survey was identical to the pre-intervention survey to quantitatively evaluate the variance and the participants completed it three weeks following the last session.

Participants’ journal entries allowed for the collection of qualitative research data concerning the levels of transformation each participant underwent during the eight-week spiritual direction experience. The SDJ had one-question prompts for each weekly session for a total of eight questions. The prompts assisted the participants in reflecting on the material covered earlier in the session. To facilitate a sense of security and allow for the free flow of thoughts, participants were instructed that their journal entries would be strictly used by the research team for analysis pertinent to the research. The journals were returned electronically, and password secured in the cloud on a computer. The journals were printed and collected at the conclusion of the project by the assigned staff member and placed in a secured file for analysis in a secluded area by the research team.

A focus group consisting of all five participants provided quantitative research information to gain insight into patterns formed and to better understand the observed changes in spiritual direction. The group met immediately following the eight-week spiritual direction experience. To allow participating members to express their

experiences freely and openly during the spiritual direction, a facilitator other than the researcher led the focus group. It also presented opportunities for the facilitator to probe deeper for further clarification. The research team instructed the focus group members to bring their journals to the focus group session. The facilitator asked five pre-determined questions of the focus group to understand which areas of the research impacted them the most and which areas needed improvement. (See Appendix D). The facilitator encouraged the focus group to state their thoughts, observations, and actions and to offer any further feedback.

Expert Review

The research utilized researcher-designed assessment instrumentation for the research project. To ensure the reliability and validity of these instruments three expert reviews were completed. The pilot assessment instruments used were (1) the pre- and post-intervention surveys, (2) focus group interview questions, and (3) prompt questions for the journal entries. The analyzed data from the pre-intervention survey provided information that was used to formulate the Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Manual used in the eight-week spiritual direction experience. The assessment instruments were submitted to expert reviewers.

The experts selected to review the pilot assessment instruments were versed in the field of spiritual direction and discipleship ministry. They were (1) Ellen Marmon, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Professor of Christian Discipleship at Asbury Theological Seminary, (2) Maxine Thomas, an itinerate elder in the African American Methodist Episcopal Church and the Director of the discipleship ministry My Sister's Keeper Ministry, and (3) Michael Voigts, an associate professor of Spiritual

Formation at Asbury Theological Seminary. The instrument used by the proficient reviewers was an expert review form (Appendix E). The review form was researcher-designed. The question was developed based on Scripture to assess the knowledge and understanding of the participants. Once the expert reviews were completed, the recommendations by the experts were used to strengthen the reliability and validity of the pre- and post-intervention surveys.

The three expert reviewers received a cover letter to familiarize them with the intent of the research project (1) the problem, (2) the purpose, and (3) the three research questions (Appendix E). The expert review of these research instruments helped to ensure that the pilot assessment instruments aligned with the intent of the research project thus enhancing the reliability and validity of the project.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

To ensure the reliability of the four pilot instruments, (1) pre-intervention survey, (2) post-intervention survey, (3) journal entries, and (4) focus group interviews measured the reliability of the project; three expert reviewers were asked to provide feedback. The expert reviews helped to determine if the instruments aligned with the purpose and research questions to affirm whether the instruments were valid and reliable. In addition, the expert reviews assisted in determining if items should be eliminated or altered to strengthen the instrumentation. Each instrument was administered uniformly among the participants. The pre- and post-intervention surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey. The participants completed the pre-intervention survey two weeks before the initiation of the eight-week spiritual direction encounter, and they completed the post-intervention survey three weeks following its conclusion.

Having an alignment between the purpose statement and the instrumentation and research questions reinforced the validity of the project. The alignment was part of the expert review. The pre- and post-intervention surveys directly addressed the purpose statement. The pre- and post-intervention surveys provided valuable information before and following intervention concerning the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors seen among Christian women regarding biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living. Also, the information attained from the pre-intervention survey helped to develop the questions for the Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Manual.

The validity of the interviews from the focus group and the Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Journal (SDJ) was supported by utilizing uniformity. The interview questions were used with each of the five participants selected for inclusion in the focus group. Likewise, the questions used for the journal entry of all participants were identical. The expert review served as an outside observer and helped to reinforce the validity of this instrument. The information attained assisted in the assessment of whether the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors were enhanced as a result of the intervention.

The research took into consideration that others may desire to duplicate this research project. Online accessibility helped to ensure the useability of the instrument regardless of barriers such as geographical location or a broad-scope pandemic. Having the perspective of expert reviewers strengthened the reliability of the instruments utilized in addressing the problem, purpose, and research questions. Christianity is worldwide. Therefore, the selection of Christian participants for inclusion in this research project does not impede this population from other researchers desiring to duplicate this project.

Data Collection

This project incorporated three evaluation methods for data collection (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, (2) direct observation, and (3) written documents (Patton, “How to Use” 7; Anyan 1). Careful attention was given to data collection techniques. Researchers must be prepared to incorporate various techniques such as “asking” through interviews, “watching” by observation, and “reviewing” the captured data (Mirian and Tisdell 105, 106). The incorporation of these techniques to strengthen the reliability of the research.

Mixed methods research provided a broader means of assessing the effectiveness of the instrumentation in fostering growth in the participants’ relationship with God and others. The use of a qualitative method extends the scope of the data analysis beyond the statistical data obtained by the quantitative method. A mixed methodology also served to increase the validity of the project and allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact of the eight-week spiritual direction sessions. Therefore, the research utilized a mixed-method approach through pre- and post-intervention surveys, focus group, and journal entries.

Triangulation through the use of insider, outsider, and researcher’s angles further enhanced the validity of the research (Sensing 61). The participants provided an insider’s angle through their valuable feedback through interviews. The expert reviews by professionals familiar with qualitative and quantitative research gave a secondary perspective. Finally, the researcher’s angle added thickness to the research. A designated staff member distributed all handouts and then collected and secured all coded data in a safe place. This consistency added to the reliability and anonymity of the project.

Two months before the eight-week spiritual direction sessions, senior pastors obtained permission to have an invitation circulated to congregants through their church's bulletin, news boards, and the church's email blast throughout June 2022. Persons were asked to invite other women who met the criterion for this project. This broadened the scope in hopes of obtaining a far-reaching sampling. Electronic invitations and consent forms containing instructions were sent to the potential participants to complete. Participants were asked to return the documents within seven days.

Five persons meeting the specified qualifications were selected to participate in the eight-week spiritual direction encounter. To obtain baseline data, participants received a Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Pre-Intervention Survey (SDPre-S) to complete online and return two weeks before the beginning of the intervention. (See Appendix A.) This instrumentation allowed for the collection, aggregation, and analysis of the data before the eight-week spiritual direction experience. The limitations and strengths of the data were taken into consideration (Mirian and Tisdell 106). The pre-intervention survey consisted of 27 questions using a four-point Likert scale and ranged from "strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree."

The pre-survey (SDPre-S) was administered and returned electronically. A predetermined staff member printed the completed SDPre-S forms and placed it in a secured file for future analysis. A team of researchers analyzed the data in a secluded area for security purposes. Likewise, Survey Monkey was the platform used to electronically administer the post-survey (SDPost-S). The completed SDPost-S forms were printed by

the predetermined staff member and placed in a secured file for further analysis. A team of researchers analyzed the data in a secluded area for security purposes.

At each of the weekly sessions, the researcher and staff arrived one hour before the scheduled meeting to pray for each other and the participants by name. The meeting room was set up with round tables with participants sitting in a semi-circular formation. Open-style seating was allowed. However, during the sessions, a number system was used for group activities to allow interaction with different people. A chair was placed in the middle of the circle as a reminder that the Holy Spirit was invited into each session as the Helper for the participants and the instructors. A chair and a table containing a binder for field notes, the Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Manual, a Bible, and a bottle of water were constant props strategically placed in the opening of the semi-circle.

Permission was obtained through the consent forms to record each session. A 10-minute devotion with contemporary Christian music, Scripture, and prayer preceded each session. In consideration of adult learning styles, the instructor provided visual teaching aids symbolic of the planned lesson. After each session, a one-sentence prayer of thanksgiving was given by each participant as they reflected on an experience that was significant to them.

The eight-week spiritual direction was held in a classroom at the Orangeburg County Library. This location was selected to increase the likelihood of diversity among the project's participants. Due to COVID-19 and the illness of the researcher, the first two classes were held via Zoom. At each in-person session, the participants used pseudonyms to sign in. (See Appendix L.) The designated staff member collected and stored the sign-in sheets in a secured place. The teaching tool titled *Spiritual Direction: A*

Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Manual guided each session. The in-person intervention was designed to allow participants a shared learning opportunity by interacting with the instructors and each other. Michael Patton believes that involvement should be valued (*Qualitative Research* 185). Light refreshments were available at each session.

The participants received a Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders Journal (DLJ) the first session for use at home (Appendix C). The DLJ provided a prompt question as a means of capturing their reflections following each intervention session. A coding system was used for anonymity (Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth). Participants were responsible for submitting their journal entries electronically each week to the researcher. Each participant electronically sent all journal entries three weeks following the conclusion of the class. Once the journals entries were received, they were securely maintained on a cloud-based computer.

Two weeks following the conclusion of the project, the post-intervention survey, designed to collect data about the level of spiritual transformation as it relates to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, was electronically administered to each participant through Survey Monkey (Appendix B). This instrument also helped in evaluating the collected research information for themes and patterns. The participants acknowledged their understanding concerning the completion of an online survey and permitted the project's use of the collected data. The completion of the online survey occurred three weeks following the final session. This instrumentation provided qualitative data for analysis. The SDPost-S was maintained on the researcher's computer, password coded, in the cloud.

To gain insight into the impact of the eight-week spiritual direction experience, all five participants met immediately after the final session in the same location. Each participant brought their journals to discuss their insights and observations during the sessions. This discussion included behavioral, emotional, and other insights they observed or noted in their journals. The focus group participants responded to five open-ended questions to ascertain noticed changes and to critique the sessions (see Appendix D). To structure a safe environment and foster trust among the participants, each person agreed to respect the privacy of others. The security and established trust allowed for a level of comfort to ask questions. It also inferred feelings of freedom to express their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and insights in their journals.

Data Analysis

A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders research project's design allowed the use of a quantitative and qualitative approach. To increase convergence, the research used triangulation of the multiple sources of data (Sensing 198). The pre- and post-intervention surveys provided information for data analysis using the online tool, Survey Monkey. Examination of the data aided in discovering patterns, themes, and insights. This allowed the researcher to understand the knowledge attained and any changes in attitudes and behavior as a result of the Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders intervention as it related to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living.

The use of personal journals, which the participants employed throughout the sessions for reflective writing allowed qualitative data to be secured for analysis (see Appendix C). A focus group, which consisted of the entire group of five participants, received open-ended questions to garner qualitative data. (See Appendix D).

Two instruments provided information about the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living by the participants. The first method, the group of five people, provided information through the instrumentation of focus group interviews. Mary Morchella stated that to enhance the understanding of the data and emerging themes, the researcher must read the data in three ways 1) literal, 2) interpretive, and 3) reflexive (Moschella 172-173). Therefore, using the second method, participants' journals provided insight into their experiences and perspectives.

A literal reading process proved helpful to analyze the information garnered from the open-ended questions by capturing keywords and phrases that emerged from the data. Then, interpretive reading allowed the data to be organized by topics that surfaced. These topics permitted the extrapolation of the implications observed in the data. Finally, reflexive reading permitted the analyzation of the data retrospectively. Following the completion of the data review, evaluation, and analysis, a summary of the evaluation was transferred to a table format for further analysis and in preparation for communicating the results.

Then the incorporation of a triangulation framework giving a multi-methods approach to the analysis process. This allowed for a higher degree of convergence in the data. The use of data themes in the analysis process allowed for the application of pattern theory analysis in the organization of the data. Identifying patterns in the data increased the preciseness of its interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Women continue to suffer from domestic abuse at an alarming rate in the United States as noted by governmental statistics. Within Christianity, women attend church services, yet they suffer in silence. Often the topic of domestic violence tends to be absent from church ministries offered to parishioners and in outreach services to their communities. In the Orangeburg community, women have one shelter to help them in disastrous situations, and supportive services are limited. Most importantly, women must be enabled to speak up without shame about their experiences and seek support.

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who have suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

Participants

Emails were sent to the United Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, and non-denominational Churches in the city of Orangeburg, South Carolina, totaling ninety-three churches. The emails requested that a notice of the research project be placed in their Sunday bulletins along with announcing it during their service throughout June 2022. The qualifying criteria were (1) over the age of eighteen (2) living in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and (3) having suffered domestic abuse. Five women agreed to participate in the research project through the pre- and post-surveys, journal assignments, and focus group interviews.

Of the five participants, three attended all sessions and two participants missed two sessions but completed all journal entries. Five participants completed both the pre- and post-surveys. The pre-surveys were completed between July 15 and July 30, 2022. The post-surveys were completed between October 29 and November 15, 2022. Both pre- and post-surveys were completed online using Survey Monkey.

Table 4.1. The Demographic of Participants

Demographics	
Characteristic	n (%)
Race/Ethnicity	
<i>Black or African American</i>	3 (60%)
<i>White or Caucasian</i>	2 (40%)
Relationship Status	
<i>Single, never married</i>	2 (40%)
<i>Married</i>	1 (20%)
<i>Widowed</i>	1 (20%)
<i>Divorced</i>	1 (20%)
Parent/Legal Guardian Status	
<i>Not a parent or legal guardian</i>	4 (80%)
<i>A parent or legal guardian</i>	1 (20%)

The participants were between 18 and 60 + years old, with 60% of the participants being between 40-49 years old. Three out of five participants, or 60% self-identified as Black and two out of five participants or 40% self-identified as White. Most participants, or 80% were not parents or legal guardians. Over half or 60% of the participants identified as Protestants, and one participant or 20% identified as Methodist. Participants

reported being a Christian for between 6 and 43 years. The demographic characteristics of participants can be found in Table 4.1:

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, were identified before the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

The survey consisted of 27 questions and was administered electronically. The questions were divided into three subgroups. Questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 13, 16, and 23 inquired about the knowledge of the participants in understanding the will of God towards the body and the world; questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, 25, and 26 addressed the attitude towards practicing spiritual disciplines for transformation into the image of Christ; and questions 2, 4, 7, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 24, and 27 dealt with the behavior of the participants as it related to spiritual transformation.

The pre-survey provided a baseline assessment before the eight-week experience of spiritual direction for spiritual transformation. Beginning with the first group of questions there was diversity in the knowledge of the participants at baseline. The results for question 6, “I believe I can be a faithful follower of Christ and not be rooted in a Christian community” showed that the participants varied in their pre-survey responses. Three of the five participants responded with disagree or strongly disagree indicating their knowledge of spiritual principles for transformational living which correlates with survey question 16, “I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person” where 80% of participants answered strongly disagree. In alignment with this understanding, the

responses to question 8 showed that 100 percent of the participants expressed their ability to ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation (answering agree or strongly agree”) when they have wronged someone. (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 - Results of Participants’ Initial Knowledge of Spiritual Transformation

#6	I believe I can be a faithful follower of Christ and not be rooted in a Christian community.	
	Pre	
	1	Disagree
	2	Agree
	3	Strongly agree
	4	Strongly disagree
#16	I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person.	
	Pre	
	1	Strongly disagree
	2	Strongly disagree
	3	Disagree
	4	Strongly disagree
#8	I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.	
	Pre	
	1	Strongly agree
	2	Strongly agree
	3	Strongly agree
	4	Strongly agree
	5	Strongly agree

Another example of variance among the responses of the participants towards spiritual growth is evident in survey question number 2 “I attend small discipleship groups regularly.” Sixty percent of the participants answered disagree or strongly disagree that they did not attend small discipleship groups regularly. The understanding

of the participants surrounding this behavioral concept is displayed below. (See Figure 4.1.)

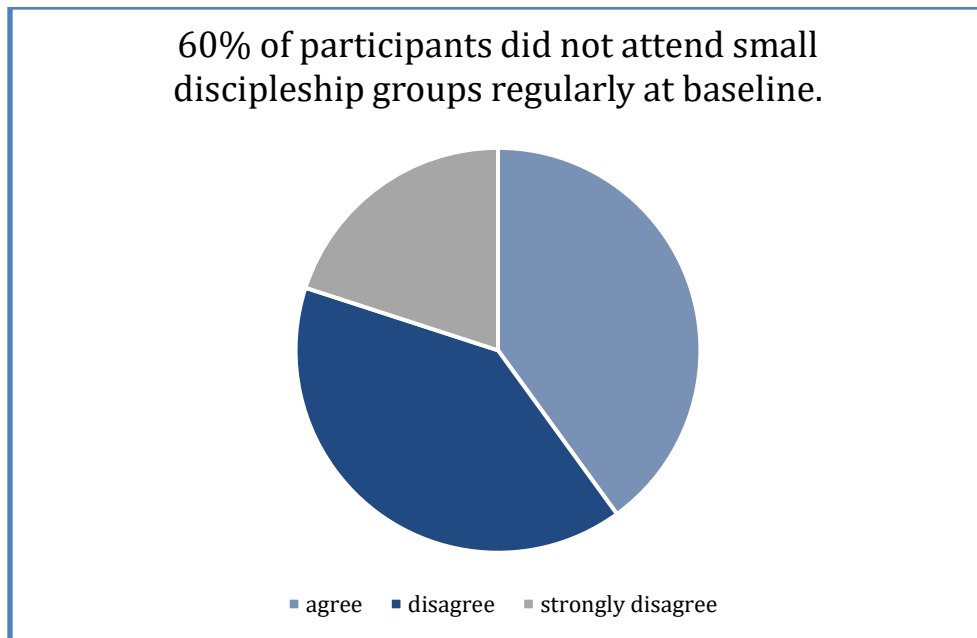


Fig. 4.1 (SQ2) - Initial understanding of God’s will for dispositional living.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified following the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse.

The post-survey responses to survey question 2 “I attend small discipleship groups regularly” concerned the behavior of the participants regarding God’s will towards dispositional living and indicated consistency in their pre- and post-survey responses. (See Figures 4.1 and 4.2.)

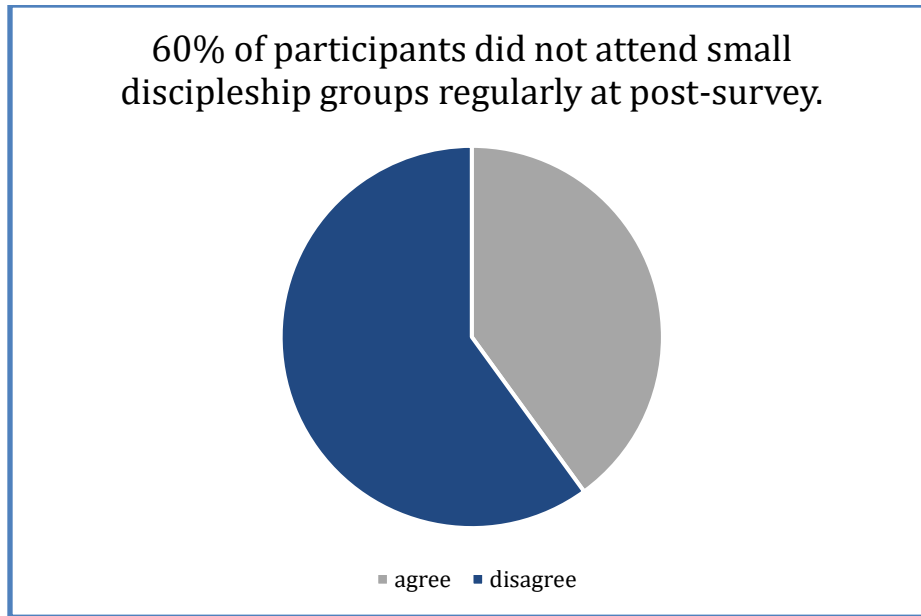


Fig. 4.2 (SQ2) - Participants' practice of dispositional living.

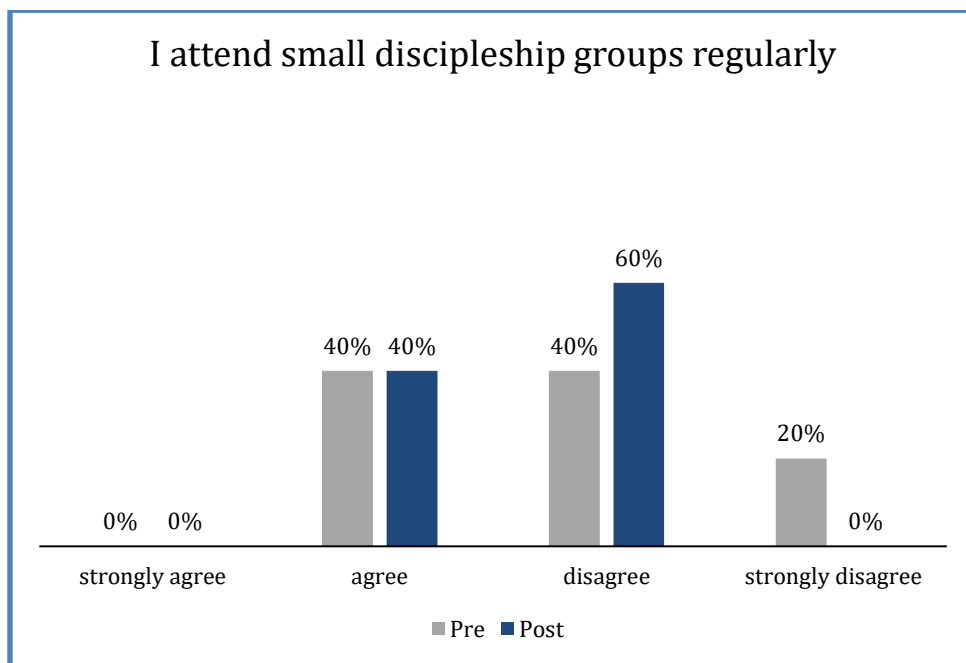


Fig. 4.3 (SQ2) – Participants' understanding of Christian relational principles.

At baseline, 60% of participants disagreed with the statement. At the post-survey, two of the five participants indicated that they do attend a discipleship group regularly.

To gain further understanding, the responses from the four-point Likert scale revealed a 20% increase in the number of participants who disagreed and a 20% decrease in the number of participants who strongly disagreed with the statement. (See Figure 4.3.) The responses indicated a wide variance in their understanding of spiritual principles necessary for relational spiritual growth.

Evaluating the variance in the responses concerning the knowledge of the participants about spiritual principles required for spiritual growth corresponded to their responses towards behavior displayed within their community. For example, viewing the

Table 4.3 - Comparative Results of Participants' Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

#17	I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers).	
	Pre	Post
	1 <i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
	2 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	3 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	4 Agree	Agree
#19	I take the initiative in working toward reconciliation with those who have wronged me.	
	Pre	Post
	1 <i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
	2 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	3 Agree	Agree
	4 Agree	Agree
	5 <i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>

responses of the participants for research question 2 revealed that there was a slight change from pre- to post-survey in the behavior of the participants as it related to the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer or reading Scriptures. Survey question 17

showed a 20% increase in their practicing patience with others and survey question 19 indicated a 40% increase in taking the initiative toward reconciliation. (See Table 4.3.)

Table 4.4 God's Will for Christian Relationship Principles

I pray regularly for the well-being of those with whom I have a difficult relationship.		
#3	Pre	Post
	1 Agree	Agree
	2 <i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
	3 Agree	Agree
	4 Agree	Agree
	5 Agree	Agree
I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.		
#13	Pre	Post
	1 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	2 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	3 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	4 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
	5 Strongly agree	Strongly agree
I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person.		
#16	Pre	Post
	1 Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree
	2 Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree
	3 <i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
	4 Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree
	5 Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree

Participants' responses to their knowledge of God's will towards spiritual principles post-intervention were consistent. For survey question 3 "I believe God is Trinitarian in nature, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" only one participant changed their response post-survey. The participants' post-survey response to survey question 13 "I am very confident that God loves me," remained constant. Eighty percent of participants did not change their understanding of survey question 16 "I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person" post-survey. (See Table 4.4.)

In summary, the results showed that the participants possessed a strong basic knowledge of Christian relational principles for dispositional living. The respondents also demonstrated an understanding of God's will for dispositional living. Comparatively, there was a slight change in their practice of spiritual disciplines.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What aspect of the eight-week experience of spiritual direction had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation among the participants?

Survey questions assessing the participants' understanding of Christian beliefs and spiritual disciplines while conversely viewing their initial understanding of a relationship with God and community are viewed in 12 of the 27 questions. (See Table 4.5.) The participants' responses did not change from pre- to post-survey. Response options were on a four-point scale and ranged from "strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree" and are divided into three subgroups. The subgroups looked at the participants' knowledge, attitude, and behavior towards God and others and their practices of spiritual disciplines.

Table 4.5 Participants' Understanding of Christian Relational Concepts

Survey responses that did not change from pre- to post-survey.		
	Pre	Post
1. I believe God will forgive all my sins.		
strongly agree	100%	100%
3. I believe God is Trinitarian in nature, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.		
strongly agree	100%	100%
5. I believe Bible reading is a necessary spiritual discipline.		
strongly agree	80%	80%
agree	20%	20%
7. I believe my life reflects orthodox biblical values.		
strongly agree	20%	20%
agree	60%	60%
disagree	20%	20%
8. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone. else.		
strongly agree	60%	60%
agree	40%	40%
11. I often talk negatively about others.		
agree	20%	20%
disagree	80%	80%
13. I am very confident that God loves me.		
strongly agree	100%	100%
15. Taking personal and practical steps to care for the environment is important to me.		
agree	100%	100%
strongly agree	100%	100%

Table 4.5 Participants' Understanding of Christian Relational Concepts (cont.)

21. I often feel separated from God.		
agree	20%	20%
disagree	60%	60%
strongly disagree	20%	20%
23. I experience God's presence through prayer.		
strongly agree	100%	100%
24. I believe Scripture calls me to serve and concretely share my faith with others.		
strongly agree	100%	100%

Survey questions 1, 3, and 13 viewed the participants' knowledge of the nature of God and his relationship to humanity. Although the responses pre- and post-survey are one hundred percent for all three questions demonstrating consistency in their knowledge of biblical doctrine. Yet, further analysis using the Likert scale revealed more information. For instance, one hundred percent of the participants responded "strongly agree" to questions 1 and 13 on the pre- and post-survey. However, for question 3, the results showed that eighty percent of the participants agreed that God is trinitarian pre- and post-survey, while twenty percent of them changed from "agree" at pre-survey to "strongly agree" post-survey, indicating the positive impact of the intervention project.

Participants' Relationship with God

One hundred percent of the participants remained consistent in their pre- and post-survey responses to survey question 27 "My relationship with God affects the way I live" indicating their understanding of the will of God for a dispositional lifestyle. All participants strongly agreed that they experience God's presence through prayer, that

Scripture calls them to serve and concretely share their faith with others, and that God loves them.

Participant 1 said, “I can use my gift of ministry by trusting God. After taking this bible study course, I feel more inclined to share his gospel with all mankind. I want to do his will by helping, encouraging, uplifting, and inspiring others. I know this is God’s will for me and I want to do his will.”

Participant 3 remarked, “To know that God the Father loved mankind and me as an individual enough to sacrifice His only Son so that my relationship with Him could be a reality is mind-blowing!”

The response of participants concerning their connectedness to God is demonstrated in questions 9 and 12. Viewing the pre-survey responses, none of the participants strongly agreed that they reached out to God during times of distress. Following the intervention, 60% of participants changed their position stating that they now “strongly agree” that they reach out to God when feeling distressed. (See Figure 4.4.) Conversely, question 12 showed an increase in the participants' responses to the advantages of feeling connected to God when reading the Bible following the intervention. The results moved from 80% to 100% of participants answered “strongly agree” post-survey (See Figure 4.5.)

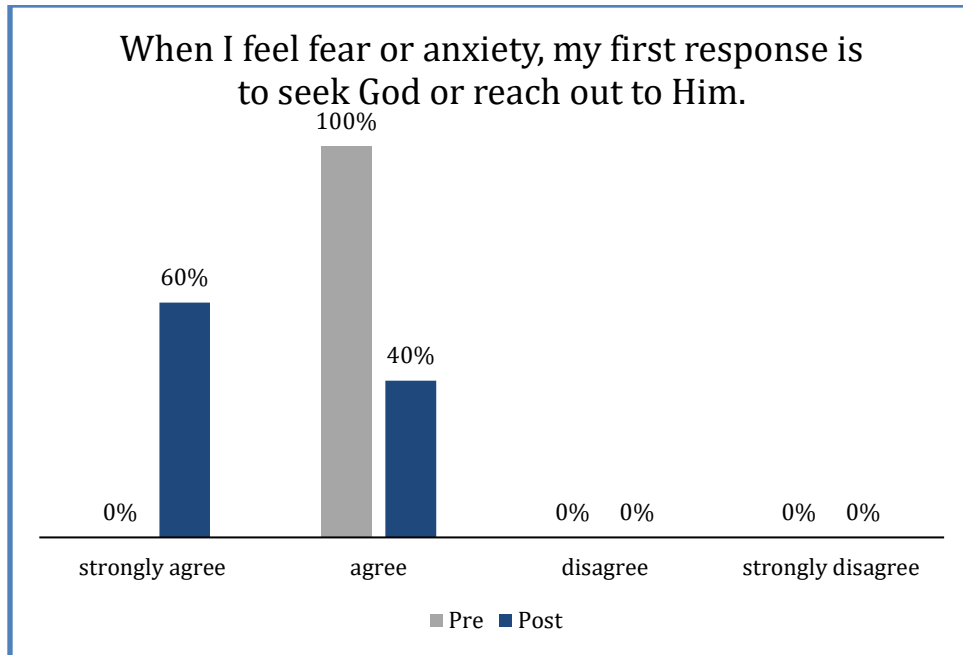


Fig. 4.4 (SQ 9) - Participants' relationship with God post-intervention.

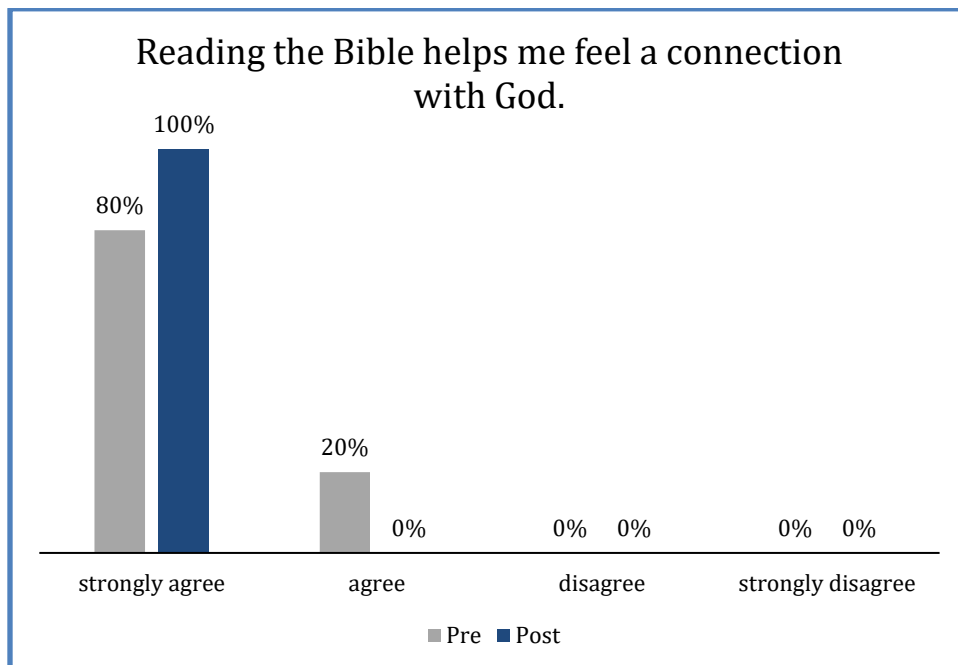


Fig. 4.5 (SQ 12) – Participants' relationship with God post-intervention.

Participants' Understanding and Practices of Dispositional Living

Missionally, the participants' responses showed their attitudes toward and practices of dispositional living in the community. Survey question 15 pertained to their understanding of God's will concerning his creation. It also demonstrated the participant's comportment in caring for the environment. One hundred percent of the respondents selected strongly agree. Likewise, their pre- and post-survey responses to question 24, which was strongly agree, did not change. All contributors' responses indicated they believed the will of God is to serve in their communities.

Before the program, all participants strongly agreed that God will forgive their sins. Over half of the participants or 60% strongly agreed that they "take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seeking reconciliation when they have wronged someone else" in both the pre- and post-survey. There was no change from pre- to post-survey in the percentage of participants who strongly agreed that God is Trinitarian. These quantitative data are consistent with the theme of "forgiveness" identified in participants' journal entries.

Participant 5 said, "I learned that if I want to be forgiven by God, I must forgive others. I now understand that if I want to be forgiven by the Father, I must forgive. This has been a longtime battle for me because I was hurt so deeply. I learned that forgiveness improves your lifestyle, Forgiveness allows you to be free."

Participant 4 commented, "This class taught me that forgiveness is very important because it allows you to be free of anger, bitterness, self-pity, and pride."

Participant 3 remarked, "I learned that if you never forgive, you will never experience the beauty of God's peace."

Multi-Sensory Approach to Learning

Using prayer, music, testimonies, charts, and props helped this group of adult learners. This multi-sensory approach to learning was selected to enhance the learning and retention of the participants. The use of a vacant chair in the center of the circle helped to remind the learners that the Holy Spirit is present at all times, even in our sessions. The participants commented that the use of the vacant chair was helpful. Participant 1 was sharing a painful memory and pointed to the chair and commented, “I know the Holy Spirit will help me.” The participants made appreciative comments about being able to relax at home and reflect on the lesson and then journal their thoughts. Similar comments were made about other props used throughout the classes. Some of the comments made are highlighted below:

Participant 1 said, “I liked having a chair in the middle of our circle as a reminder that the Holy Spirit is present with us.”

Participant 2 commented, “Thank you for the class. I appreciated being able to talk about my unforgiveness in a judge-free space.”

Participant 3 stated, “The charts helped me understand the Christian principles taught.”

Participant 4 remarked, “Journaling my thoughts helped me to retain the spiritual principles being taught.”

Participant 5 commented, “I enjoyed walking into the room and having soft music playing which made me feel welcome.”

Participant 1 shared in a journal entry. “I can use my gift of ministry by trusting God. After taking this Bible study course, I feel more inclined to share his gospel with all

mankind. I want to do his will by helping, encouraging, uplifting, and inspiring others. I know this is God's will for me and I want to do his will."

The Experience of Working Together

Being in a cross-generational small group was different from the normal format of breaking out into special interest groups and the participants did comment on the age difference, stating that they were able to learn from each other's perspective. Several points of designated times for group discussions found the participants voicing their excitement about being able to get together to flesh out the topic and to hear each other's viewpoints. The following are a few of their statements:

Participant 1 said, "I enjoyed being with this group and I appreciated that we were given time to process the information together."

Participant 2 stated, "I thought the use of groups was fun and I gained a lot from hearing the views of the other people in our group."

Participant 3 stated, "I learned a lot from the older ladies in the group."

Age did not factor into the dynamics of this group. The women respected the input from each other and looked forward to the weekly meetings.

The Focus Group Experience

The focus group interview was a designated time for the participants to come together with an unbiased leader who was not involved in the classes to share their experience during this eight-week research project. The participants were advised two weeks before the focus group's meeting at the end of the session. The participants used their journal entries and field notes to respond to the preset questions. Themes derived

from the data collected and analyzed included an awareness of a love relationship with the Trinity and an awareness of the need to practice spiritual principles.

Awareness of a Love Relationship with the Trinity by Grace

During the interview, the participants agreed that the eight-week sessions made them more aware of the ministry of the Trinity in their lives. A few of the participants voiced their surprise that they grew up in a church but did not understand the importance of knowing them. Some of their comments were, "surprised that they (the Trinity) desired a relationship with me;" "I am eternally grateful;" and "Jesus shed his blood for the world and me."

When asked what they will take away from the session the participants responded as follows:

Participant 1 said, "God's Holy Spirit by grace comes to live on the inside and offers guidance in my life day by day if I allow him to."

Participant 3 commented during the focus group interview about her understanding of her relationship with God stating: "Understanding what a relationship means was an eye-opener. I now know that God wants a relationship."

Then, participant 5 summarized the love of God in this profound statement: "I know that God loves me, and he will never love me more than he does right now."

Awareness of the Need to Practice Spiritual Principles

The participants shared that they were made more aware of their relational practices within their community. Several of the respondents stated that having the mind of Christ must be a conscious choice and should be evident in everyday activities.

Participant 2 said, "I must begin to share God's plan, purpose, and perspective of the life

that Christ has for us.” Then, participant 3 replied, “I must begin to align my life-living by understanding the plans God has for me.”

Participant 1 said, “I now enjoy quiet times alone with God. My job requires me to be in my car a lot. I have talked the ears off God in my car. I seldom listened to religious music. I now enjoy it. I have learned to listen to the words. I also feel closer to God when I take long prayerful walks outdoors. I feel him in the breeze or see him in the sunset.”

Participant 4 said, “In our session today the comment was made: ‘Forgiveness puts you in a victorious position and removes you from a victim’s position.’ I don’t want to be a victim. It is hard to face the truths of abuse and betrayal. It hurts! However, I want to live the life that God has in store for me. He did not intend for me to curl in a ball and feel sorry for myself forever. There is a great big world out there and many hurting people that just maybe I could help.”

Participant 5 remarked, “I am learning to listen more, speak less, and try not to judge. I am trying to be intentional in helping others. God is so good to me, and I want to be more like him.”

All participants strongly agreed that they experience God’s presence through the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer and solitude. Conversely, they revealed that Scripture calls them to serve and concretely share their faith with others and that God loves them. The use of a multi-sensory learning approach proved to be impactful on the spiritual transformation of the participants.

Evidence of Transformation

During the focus group interviews, the participants spoke about how the eight-week sessions impacted their lives. Most of them spoke of how cautious they were about sharing personal information at the beginning of the sessions but following the first session, they felt a connection with each other. As they reflected on their spiritual journey, a few statements the interviewees made were: “I feel a sense of peace within.” “My understanding of the Bible has given me a deeper love for God.” “I have held unforgiveness for such a long time, now I feel free.” Participant 1 said that she gained a fresh perspective on the importance of not making the sacrament of communion a routine ritual, but she would intentionally remember that because of the cross, Christians are baptized into a new life in Christ. Participant 5 said that the breakout sessions allowed them to have a chance to learn about each other.

Dispositional Living

The testimonies about the impact of this project were not just personal, they spoke of how their relationships with their family and friends changed. The interviewees spoke of how transformative the lesson on forgiveness was, but they equally spoke of the effects of the lesson on love. Participant 4 said, “I learned ways to show everyday love through this class. I am learning to listen more, speak less, and try not to judge. I am trying to be intentional in helping others. Sometimes it’s just the simple things like giving compliments or letting someone go ahead of me in a line. God is good to me, and I want to be more like him.”

Other interviewees commented: “Reminding people to look at how God is working on our behalf in our everyday lives is a great way to encourage people to desire

to be more like Jesus.” Each participant spoke of the transformation this interventive project brought into their lives. In response to research question 3, these results demonstrate the impact of the eight-week study on women who suffered domestic abuse.

Summary of Major Findings

The analysis of data from this research project produced several major findings. The next chapters presents a detailed presentation of the findings. However, a summary of the findings is listed below:

1. A well-planned environment enhances trust and learning.
2. The character of the instructor who teaches foundational biblical truth systematically improves the comprehension, retention, and application of the subject matter.
3. The love of God is a relational spiritual truth that must be taught.
4. Utilizing multisensory learning techniques has the propensity to stimulate spiritual growth and transformation.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Women who have suffered domestic abuse continue to suffer silently in their personal, social, and religious environments. Throughout history, many of these women have never shared their inner pain which can affect how they function in life and ministry. Christianity has not sufficiently provided opportunities for the healing of their wounds. This intervention project sought to provide a discipleship experience that would enlighten and inspire women through spiritual direction for transformation into the image of Christ. Before implementing the project, research was conducted to examine historically the influence of various segments of society as it relates to the abuse women suffer and to gain a better understanding. This chapter discusses the conclusions derived from this project.

Major Findings

Having concluded the research, the following four items summarizes the significant findings of this project.

First Finding: Importance of A Well-Planned Environment

A well-planned environment enhances trust and learning. Intimate domestic violence has risen to an epidemic level in our society. Still, it was surprising to discover that churches did not address the ever-increasing issue of the suffering of women at the hands of someone they loved and trusted. Recently, a ministerial group in Orangeburg, SC formed to address issues within the community, but domestic violence was not among the tenets on their agenda. Therefore, it becomes challenging to expect women to fully

experience spiritual transformation into the image of Christ when society fails to address the issue. Women need an understanding of God's eternal universal love for his creation and of who they are in Christ.

The personal observations before initiating the project were frightened women who were ashamed to share with their current family and friends the suppressed secrets of their abusive past. Two respondents to the letter of inquiry distributed amongst congregants of the various churches in Orangeburg, South Carolina stated that they wanted to come but they did not want their families to know about their abusive history with their then-intimate partner. There appears to be societal stigmatism about domestic abuse. Women throughout this community desire wholeness. Yet, churches within this county did not offer support groups for this population. Although there is a shelter for women and their children who have fled from their unsafe environment, support is needed from the perspective of a Christian worldview. Women who remain in abusive situations, as well as those who have sought safety, will benefit from understanding that God loves his creation equally and desires that humanity lives in unity within their community.

To respond to this need, a central location was chosen that citizens from all socioeconomic levels within the county utilize. Selecting a location that eliminated barriers affiliated with any particular community provided an open environment for building trust and learning. Several participants commented on the convenience of the library. The literature review indicated the importance of Christian communities coming together, unified in purpose for spiritual transformation embodying the work of the church to worship, teach, train, and serve.

In addition, when learners believe their shared experiences and knowledge has been heard, it results in co-creating a collaborative leadership and learning environment (Etmanski et al.). Observing the attendees opening up to share personal information was rewarding. For some attendees, it was their first time sharing their past experiences. Observing the fear of women sharing their past correlated with the findings of this project and the literature review that a well-planned, structured environment enhances trust and learning.

Biblically, the research revealed that God is vested in caring for and developing every aspect of human beings—body, soul, and spirit. Taking note of Jesus’ ministry in Scripture gives examples of the importance of the environment for holistic teaching and training as Jesus withdraws from the crowds to be with his disciples or to separate them from distractions (Matt. 12:15; Mark 3:7; Luke 5:16). Throughout this project, the participants commented that they enjoyed having opportunities to share and receive feedback from each other. There is a need among Christian communities for women who have suffered domestic abuse to be in an environment that celebrates the equality and diversities of women who seek spiritual formation.

Second Finding: Character of the Instructor.

The character of the instructor who teaches foundational Biblical truth systematically improves the comprehension, retention, and application of the subject matter.

One of the greatest teachings of Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount of Olives where he taught about the characteristics of a Christian disciple (Matt. 5-7). But Jesus was not only teaching, but he was also mentoring his disciples. Jesus was demonstrating

the role of a Christian leader which is to teach foundational biblical truth in a manner that could be comprehended, retained, and applied relationally in dispositional living. David Teel wrote that Christians are called to own and model what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Christian leaders in Orangeburg, South Carolina failed to model to women suffering from domestic abuse what it means to have a voice and advocate for others. In each character-building segment, Jesus taught his followers what was expected of them and the role that God performs in their transformation journey.

In keeping with this model, this research project was designed, to begin with, lessons on the Trinity and then progress with lessons on Christian principles. The attendees affirmed that their understanding of the relationship between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit was enhanced by the lessons. Responses to support this finding included the following: “I grew up in the church but never understood the relationship of the Trinity;” “Now I really understand that God expects me to give out of what has been given to me;” and “Thank you for teaching me that being a part of God’s family qualifies me to live joyfully and freely.” These statements point to the fact that further teaching on theological principles and Christian characteristics will help develop a worldview of God’s purpose for women in his kingdom.

One virtue ethics concept gleaned in the literature review noted that a person must understand what “good” means before they can determine whether their behavior is correct or prosocial (Sakellariouv). To put forth a Christian-based lesson on the relational expectations of God for humanity, after teaching about the trinity, the next four lessons dealt with Christian relational principles. Forgiveness was one of the lessons that appeared to have the greatest impact on the participants. Some of the participants shared

that following the course, taking time for self-reflection revealed how they could improve inter-relationally with family and friends. One participant stated that the course showed her that she had to forgive her ex-husband by extending forgiveness to him the same way God's grace was extended to her. One overarching theological theme from the literature review is the love of God that draws a disciple to a life of holiness. The findings from this project align with this theme. One participant felt free like she had emerged from a cocoon after the class on forgiveness.

Biblically, the gospel message has been given from a male perspective which failed to give the woman a voice in her defense. An example of this is the story of Tamar, the wife of Er, who was not able to defend herself, but she is important in the lineage of Jesus. In response to the need for a woman to share how God values women, a discipleship manual was developed. The first three lessons informed the attendees about the relational aspects of the Trinity, God's soteriological plan, and how God views them in relationship with the Trinity. These lessons were developed to align with the biblical teachings of Paul in Ephesians chapter four. Here, Paul pleads for the church in Ephesus to keep the unity of the Spirit by the grace that has been given through Christ so that they may grow into a perfect man (Eph. 4:1-16). This passage was selected not only because of its reference to unity but also because it delivers a profound picture of the ministry of Christ in breaking the yokes of bondage to set the captives free (Luke 4:18).

There was a systematic method to Jesus' teaching as seen in the Sermon on the Mount. He begins with a focus on God and his relationship to those who belong to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:1-11). Then, Jesus taught them about the characteristics and practices of a disciple (Matt. 5:12 - 7:28). This biblical model was infused in this project.

The sessions initiated with teachings on theological concepts followed by foundational Christian principles such as unconditional love, forgiveness, and dispositional living missionally.

The literature review showed that using personal stories and biblical examples helped to make some of the foundational principles easier to learn. Anthony Keaty said, “Effective learning required that the material taught be presented in such a way that the student might grasp the unifying principle of the material itself” (500). Paul also spoke of the necessity of foundational principles in facilitating spiritual growth in Christians using the analogy of “milk” and “meat” (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-12). As a result of the effective use of parables in Jesus’ ministry, people were set free to comprehend, retain, and apply the lesson for the betterment of the community. Personal stories about how the relational aspects of the Trinity and the love of God impacted my own faith in God helped to bring clarity to the concepts of milk and meat for the participants. The fact that the participants did not understand some of the principles, such as the unconditional love of God and forgiveness, indicated the need for more teachings on foundational principles within the Christian community of Orangeburg. The participants appeared to look forward to each session and said they wanted to attend more sessions if offered.

Third Finding: Understanding of The Love of God

The love of God is a relational spiritual truth that must be taught. Upon completion of the course, all participants expressed their gratitude for having a better understanding of foundational biblical truths and God’s will for applying these principles in their communities. Sharing the worldview of God’s unconditional love allowed attendees the opportunity to see the soteriological love of God through a new lens.

Observing the facial expressions of Participant 1 as she read Scriptures from the book of Genesis, chapters 1 through 3, and discussed the meaning of the texts concerning women was profound. There was excitement in her voice. Other participants expressed how the classes allowed them to better understand the omnipotence and omnipresence of God when they made statements such as “God was with me all along” or “It was God who directed me to this class.” Other participants used expressions like “mind-blowing” and “amazing” to express their new level of understanding. Having completed the analysis of the data from this class, the findings prove that studying the Scriptures about receiving and giving unconditional love brings healing. The reflective thoughts during the focus group interview vividly expressed the importance of sharing everyday love for spiritual formation. Participants responded that they must be “more intentional in helping others,” “giving more compliments,” and “being more like him (Christ).”

Reviewing the literature surrounding God’s view of Adam and Eve and his purpose for them supported the findings of the project. The literature review revealed that society must move beyond subsets such as creation, hierarchy, or feminism theology to be inclusive of God’s worldview as both Adam and Eve were created in his image (Groth 57). God’s love must be extended outward to bring healing within the realms of the community as love seeks the highest good for others (D. Teel; Roat; Zavada). The findings of this project concur with the literature review in that having a full understanding of the will and purpose of God for one’s life and that the love of God extends beyond gender, race, and other societal inequities is life changing.

Biblically, Jesus is seen ministering to the needs of those who came to him in faith. Jesus saw a funeral possession of a widow’s young son and was so moved with

compassion that he restored the young boy's life (Luke 7:11-17). Scripture paints a picture of a compassionate Jesus who healed all who came to him (Matt. 4:23-25, 15:29-31; Luke 6:19). In this project women came to the class seeking Jesus for healing because they wanted spiritual formation. Their testimonies demonstrated that the findings of this study were in accordance with the biblical and theological segments of this project. The participants' statements reflected Karen Teel's belief that God planned for women to bear the *imago Dei* (37-9). The data analysis indicated that they believed that God created them equal to men and he will transform them and use them in ministry.

Scripture instructs that God blessed humankind and gave them dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). God also established a covenant of unity and obligation between man and woman to provide for their aesthetic, physical, and intellectual needs (Kroeger and Beck 16; Huntzinger 9). Through attendance, in this course, women learned that their holistic well-being is important to God. Their localized, self-indulged perspectives slipped into a worldview lens where they became more concerned with obedience to God. The participants were willing to let go of confining ideologies and allow God's love to propel them into a world of freedom. One participant let go of years of anger and forgave her ex-husband. Observing the participants bonding and edifying each other during the classes was proof of the will of God being fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth Finding: Utilization of Multisensory Learning Techniques

Utilizing multisensory learning techniques has the propensity to stimulate spiritual growth and transformation. As mentioned before, the participants commented on the visual aid used during the sessions. Being able to use charts allowed certain words from discussions to remain visual during the class. This approach to learning allowed

time to observe participants' interaction with each other during their discussions. The vacant chair in the center of the group circle proved to be the most discussed or referenced prop used in the classes. The chair was representative of the Holy Spirit's presence. The Bible was used for reading many times instead of an electronic device to portray the importance of the Word of God. The senses were touched through songs that were interjected into the lesson when a participant was moved by something that was mentioned during the class. Other times an attendee would share a particular verse of Scripture that corresponded with something being stated in the lesson. Many times, the women wept not out of sadness but more as a cleansing response to something that was said. Understanding that they were not alone, these women found their voice.

The importance of symbolism in Christianity as revealed in the literature review fortifies the ministry of Jesus to all who believe in Him. The Cross, baptism, and communion all stand for a new life for the believer in Christ. These symbols signify the vocational ministry of Jesus for humanity (Sands 38). The use of symbolism in this project proved advantageous by touching the senses of the participants and allowing them to feel safe enough to share. The attendees spoke of how they knew that God was calling them to go and witness to other women who have suffered domestic abuse.

Biblically, Jesus implemented diversity in his teaching and mentoring ministry. Jesus used parables to convey a point throughout the gospels—items from their immediate environment such as the fig tree that did not bear (Matt. 3:10, 7:19, 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-25; Luke 3:9, 13:7-8), or he stimulated their thought process with reflective thinking such as referring back to the law of Moses (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 2:41-42). The Scripture indicates that Jesus taught from the top of a mountain, from a boat, within a

home, or in the temple and each of these environment's visual effects was impactful to spiritual growth.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The implications of this study can vastly impact the Christian community as a whole. Domestic abuse has no boundaries when it comes to the ethical, economical, or sociological makeup of the abusee. There are variations in the percentage of African Americans who suffer from domestic abuse as opposed to the White population. One of the main contributing factors is an imbalance of power. Regardless of the small population of Orangeburg, the women's shelter does not have the capacity to safely shelter women and their children who are fleeing an abusive relationship for safety. The female and her children who live with an abusive partner face long-term consequences.

One implication of this study is that the Christian faith community must incorporate a discipleship ministry for women who suffered abuse. Adult women who are eighteen and over who endured living with or dating an abusive partner continue to suffer years after their relationship ends. These women profess their Christian faith and attend church regularly, yet they have not experienced the healing ministry of Christ to help them forgive and release feelings of hostility. This study showed that a discipleship ministry for women who suffered domestic abuse can benefit greatly from learning that Christ cares about the condition of their hearts. The love God shares with each individual is a personal love to be experienced by all. Building communal relationships can be challenging but by the grace of God, it can be achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another implication is the positive effects of practicing spiritual disciplines such as reading the bible or practicing solitude with God. Practicing spiritual disciplines is a necessary routine for building a relationship with the Trinity. The findings indicated that the participants were amazed at how praying and practicing solitude can enhance their relationship with God. Practicing this principle enriches their relationship with God as well as their interrelationship. The spiritual disciplines are designed for personal transformation which will impact the community.

The final implication is the importance of the instructor in the spiritual transformation process. Christian educators must set an example by partaking in the lesson first and be able to use concrete examples that adult students can understand. By providing the adult learners with applicable life lessons the Christian educator will touch the understanding, knowledge, and behavior of the adult students. Keeping the class engaged with the lesson should come from a multi-sensory platform. When the senses are stimulated it helps to keep the adult student engaged with the lesson which enhances spiritual growth and learning. Christian educators who utilize small groups or breakout sessions allow the students to exchange ideas and personal stories as people can learn from each other.

Limitations of the Study

This intervention research project set out to observe the results of women who suffered abuse and lived in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Orangeburg is a somewhat rural city with a population of only 82,962 as of July 2021, thus, the findings may vary in a larger city that may offer more resources(“Quick Facts”). However, the abuse of women

by an intimate partner is an epidemic across the United States and continues to be a key topic even in areas that have limited resources for abused women.

When the classes began, one of the participants, a professor, was in the midst of a project and began with the third lesson. Although she completed all the home assignments, the group would refer back to the first two lessons to help her understand a concept or a point being discussed. Doing this took away from the current lesson but it helped the participants because they were able to retrieve information and make it applicable. This was not a problem but could have been avoided if the participants had started together.

The Doctor of Ministry class designed the pre- and post-survey questions used in this project. The curriculum or teaching manual used in this study was researcher-designed. (See Appendix M.) It correlated to the selected questions used for the pre- and post-survey questions. It became clear from the responses of the participants that the attained knowledge and understanding were transforming. Comments about learning that God forgives indicated that knowledge was gained. However, as the lessons progressed the realization was that the journal questions could be worded differently to inspire a higher level of transformation in the behaviors of the participants by requesting a specific behavior be performed.

Areas of transformation in the behavior of the participants were observed and reported, but wording of the journal questions differently may have obtained deeper responses. An example of how the wording could better impact behavior changes is with journal question 5: "Why is forgiveness important? What barriers have you faced when forgiving?" A better way to have stated this question to be more impactful behaviorally

is: “Why is forgiveness important? What barriers have you faced when forgiving someone and in what ways are you practicing forgiveness?”

A major problem was getting women to attend the classes. I spoke with several women who were afraid to come to the classes because they did not want anyone, especially their families, to know about the abuse they experienced. One woman said, “My first husband abused me, but my children don’t know about it, and I don’t want them to know!” This corresponded to the information revealed in the literature review which stated that women are ashamed of their experiences and remain silent.

This is a needed project, however, those looking to generalize this research project must consider the limitations. The size of the geographical area may limit the number of possible participants as well as the number of available resources. Allowing participants to begin the session late can reduce learning opportunities. Designing the curriculum has benefits but some limitations may factor into the quality of the data.

Unexpected Observations

There were several unexpected observations attained from the participants before, during, and following the intervention project. The group sessions provided some vital information about how abused women respond when they believe they are in a safe environment. Then, the observations by the focus group facilitator revealed how much the women believed they had grown spiritually. Finally, analyzing the data revealed valuable information about the impact of the classes. The observations may not have a direct bearing on the research questions but the findings present evidence of the impact of this study on the changes experienced by the participants. The observations are related to expectations and testimonials and to surprising results from the data.

Expectations and Testimonials

Upon initial contact with the potential participants, there were dichotomic statements about the excitement to be a part of this study while experiencing an elevated level of nervousness about revealing their story. To relieve the tension, icebreakers were used to stimulate conversation, and an innovative circular clap to reward the participants for sharing quickly dissipated the nervousness. The results were amazing. Participants' faces and body language showed that they were engaged in the conversations. Even when I forgot to use the circular clap, one of the participants would remind the group that it was time to "clap." The participants stated that they did not expect the changes they experienced in their devotional time. Following the last class, the group agreed to meet periodically to continue their support of each other.

During the group sessions, it was interesting to see who presented the information discussed. There was no tension about who would be present for the group. Although one person did most of the presentations, each member of the group shared her connection with the lesson. It was interesting to see women working together and not being aggressive about taking the lead. The environment was conducive to bonding. The room had indirect sunlight which made it inviting. The participants complimented me on being well-prepared and making the lessons interesting. It was refreshing to see a group of women supporting each other.

The focus group facilitator confirmed the effectiveness of this study on the participants. The women spoke of how their devotional life has changed for the better. One of the spiritual disciplines that they had not been practiced before was solitude. The group reported that they looked forward to meeting God during this sacred time.

Elements of their learning environment that left an impression were the brain-storming sessions, the charts that were posted around the room, and the empty chair in the middle of our circle representing a seat for the Holy Spirit. I was surprised by how logistics can impact adult learners. The focus group facilitator also reported that the participants commented on the importance of this course and that it should be taught in churches to help other women.

Surprising Results from the Data

Survey Monkey was used to analyze the data and some results were unexpected. Several responses to questions did not change from pre- to post-survey. This may have correlated with the length of time these participants have been Christian disciples and the knowledge they had obtained over the years they have served in ministry. However, there were some foundational questions that the participants did not understand such as the response of Participant 1 who after taking the class, changed her behavior to begin taking the initiative toward reconciling a broken relationship (question 19). There were a few biblical concepts that the participants did not understand such as God's commandment to forgive. The overarching understanding from the data analysis is that even among the leadership serving in churches there is a need to teach foundational principles.

Recommendations

This intervention research study focused on producing spiritual transformation in abused women in Orangeburg, South Carolina who participated in an eight-week discipleship course. The finding of this study proved favorably for the effectiveness of this course, however, there are areas where improvement may generate greater results.

First, the intervention was shortened to eight weeks due to COVID-19 closing many facilities where the classes could convene. The amount of time needed to go

through the biblical principles, particularly the lessons on the spiritual disciplines was not possible due to my illness along with COVID. The participants gave no complaints, but if given time to have longer discussions I believe that the learning could have been more profound. Another constraint of the 8 weeks was the inability to divide lessons into more digestible portions. For example, the lesson on the Trinity would have benefited the participants more by dividing it into two lessons.

Second, designing the instrumentation was helpful because the surveys, teaching manual, journal questions, and focus group questions were tailored to address the theme of the three research questions. However, the journal questions could have been worded differently to not only address the knowledge and attitude changes of the participants but also the transformation of the behavior of the participants. There were behavior changes but if the wording had been structured differently the level of spiritual transformation could have been greater.

Third, utilizing more than one instructor may offer different perspectives for teaching adult learners. However, training additional instructors was not something that could be implemented in this study due to the time constraints imposed because of COVID-19 and my illness.

Fourth, exploring ways to facilitate breaking the silence of abused women so they may find healing is a task that Christian leaders must undertake in their respective churches.

Fifth, training on a “Rule of Life” to strengthen their devotional life proved to be a major influencer in the transformation of the participants and is highly recommended for churches to implement this training.

Sixth, this is a needed course for women who have suffered abuse by an intimate partner.

The response of the participants validated the need for foundational teachings on biblical principles to help women understand God's will and purpose for them. Most churches do not recognize this need because women remain silent. Finding pastors and leaders who are willing to advocate for these women to come forward and receive the healing that Jesus offers through the living Word may be difficult. As stated, several women admitted to being abused but were afraid and ashamed to let their families know about their experiences.

Postscript

This intervention project was not just for the women in the class, it was for me also. I did not see the significance of the instrumentation that I designed. Although I prayed before writing the instrumentation and relied on my training to help, I still did not know if women would see a change. And I certainly did not expect to hear some of the comments I received from the women.

My spiritual life was impacted as well. I have a prayer partner and we pray weekly for various things including this research project. But this spiritual journey has inspired a renewed thirst for more of God. I have moments of longing to be in his presence whether in solitude or simply sitting and crying in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

To think that shortening the lessons from 12 to 8 and still producing transformative results is a testimony of the power of God to accomplish good works in us. Many Scripture verses came to life during these classes verifying the omniscience and

omnipotence of God during our time together. Watching the Holy Spirit remind participants of a song and then their willingness to share the song even when they were not a singer was amazing. Insecurities were dropped as we joined together in song.

This taught me that little is much in the Master's hands. I have grown in my faith in God and his love for his people. I am grateful for this opportunity to be an instrument God used to touch the lives of others while building my faith in Him. My concluding thought is "What A Mighty God We Serve." Amen.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Quantitative Pre-Intervention Survey (referred to as SDPre-S) for RQ #1

Instructions: This survey proposes to evaluate the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women who have suffered domestic violence prior to attending an eight-week spiritual discipleship experience to measure the change in their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. There are no right, or wrong answers so please respond honestly.

Part 1: Demographic Information

Please complete the demographic section. Your information will be held in strict confidence.

I. Age: 18-29__ 30-39__ 40-49__ 50-59__ 60 and above__ (please specify)____

II. Ethnic Group: African American __ Asian__ Hispanic/Latino__ White__

III. Country of origin _____ US Citizen? Yes__ No__

IV. Are you a resident of Orangeburg County? Yes__ No__

V. City currently residing: _____

VI. Marital Status: Married__ Widowed__ Divorced__ Single__ Other__ (please specify)_____

VII. I am a parent of a child under the age of 18: Yes__ No__ How many children? ____

VIII. Years you have been a Christian 1-5__ 6-10__ 11+__ Please specify_____

IX. Involvement in your local church: Pastor__ Ministry Leader__ Other_____

Please specify are:_____

X. What denomination are you affiliated with? __ Catholic __ Protestant __ Non-

Denominational __ Other (please specify) _____

Part 2: Instrumentation

The following statements are measured by a four-point interval scale:

1 (Strongly Disagree) 2 (Disagree) 3 (Agree) 4 (Strongly Agree)

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I believe God will forgive all my sins.				
2. I attend small discipleship groups regularly.				
3. I believe God is Trinitarian in nature, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.				
4. I pray regularly for the well-being of those with whom I have a difficult relationship.				
5. I believe Bible reading is a necessary discipline.				
6. I believe I can be a faithful follower of Christ and not be rooted in a Christian community.				
7. I believe my life reflects orthodox biblical values.				
8. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.				
9. When I feel fear or anxiety, my first response is to seek God or reach out to him.				
10. I believe if I do good things, God will give me a good life.				
11. I often talk negatively about others.				
12. Reading the Bible helps me feel a connection with God.				
13. I am very confident that God loves me.				

14. Having a personal relationship with God does not require any human community.				
15. Taking personal and practical steps to care for the environment is important to me.				
16. I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person.				
17. I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers).				
18. I experience God's presence through reading the Scriptures.				
19. I take the initiative in working toward reconciliation with those who have wronged me.				
20. I am currently not living at peace with someone (e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, fellow church members, etc.).				
21. I often feel separated from God.				
22. I have been hurt by other Christians.				
23. I experience God's presence through prayer.				
24. I believe Scripture calls me to serve and concretely share my faith with others.				
25. It is important to live a life that increasingly reflects orthodox biblical values.				
26. I experience God's presence through corporate worship.				
27. My relationship with God affects the way I live.				

Appendix B

Post-Intervention Survey(referred to as SDPost-S) For RQ #2

Instructions: This survey proposes to evaluate the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women who have suffered domestic abuse prior to attending an eight-week spiritual discipleship session to measure the change in their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. There are no right, or wrong answers so please respond honestly.

The following statements are measured by a four-point interval scale:

1 (Strongly Disagree) 2 (Disagree) 3 (Agree) 4 (Strongly Agree)

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I believe God will forgive all my sins.				
2. I attend small discipleship groups regularly.				
3. I believe God is Trinitarian in nature, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.				
4. I pray regularly for the well-being of those with whom I have a difficult relationship.				
5. I believe Bible reading is a necessary discipline.				
6. I believe I can be a faithful follower of Christ and not be rooted in a Christian community.				
7. I believe my life reflects orthodox biblical values.				
8. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.				
9. When I feel fear or anxiety, my first response is to seek God or reach out to him.				
10. I believe if I do good things, God will give me a good life.				
11. I often talk negatively about others.				

12. Reading the Bible helps me feel a connection with God.				
13. I am very confident that God loves me.				
14. Having a personal relationship with God does not require any human community.				
15. Taking personal and practical steps to care for the environment is important to me.				
16. I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person.				
17. I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers).				
18. I experience God's presence through reading the Scriptures.				
19. I take the initiative in working toward reconciliation with those who have wronged me.				
20. I am currently not living at peace with someone (e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, fellow church members, etc.).				
21. I often feel separated from God.				
22. I have been hurt by other Christians.				
23. I experience God's presence through prayer.				
24. I believe Scripture calls me to serve and concretely share my faith with others.				
25. It is important to live a life that increasingly reflects orthodox biblical values.				
26. I experience God's presence through corporate worship.				
27. My relationship with God affects the way I live.				

Appendix C

Journal Questions (referred to as DSJ) for RQ #3

1. How have God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit helped you in your spiritual journey?
2. What have you learned from the lesson on “Sin”? How will you use what you have learned in Ministry?
3. Using these terms, Salvation, Justification, Baptism, and Redemption, explain what being in the family of God means to you.
4. Which spiritual disciplines are you practicing? Which spiritual disciplines are you adding to your rule of life? Why?
5. Why is forgiveness important? What barriers have you faced when forgiving?
6. What is the root of shame and what effect does it have on a person’s life?
7. In what way do you practice “having the mind of Christ”?
8. What practices have you used for “everyday love”? Are you extending “everyday love” to others? How?

Appendix D

Qualitative Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions (referred to as DSF) for RQ #3

1. What will you take away from their experience that can help you in life/ministry?
2. What was most helpful to you in this eight-week discipleship experience? Why?
3. What was least helpful to you in this eight-week discipleship experience? Why?
4. What would you change to improve this eight-week discipleship experience?
Why?
5. Do you believe you can use this eight-week discipleship experience in your
ministry context?

Appendix E

Expert Review

Expert Reviewer Letter

Dear Reviewer:

My name is Minnie Anderson, and I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. I am working on my dissertation project. To ensure the validity and reliability of the project, expert reviews must be conducted. I am inviting you to serve as one of my reviewers for this project. Your academic expertise combined with your years of experience as a teacher will be an asset to my research project. Also, I respect you as a person of integrity.

The aspect of my research study that I am asking you to take part in is the research process. The instruments selected for this study are (1) Discipleship Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys (to collect quantitative data). (2) Discipleship Participant Journal Questions and (3) Focus Group Interview Questions (to collect qualitative data). Included with this letter are:

1. The description of the research project, including the purpose,
2. The three (3) research questions,
3. The three (3) researcher-designed instrumentation, and
4. Evaluation form for the expert reviewer.

You may use the evaluation forms to appraise the three (3) instrumentations.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the purpose and instrumentation, expert reviews are necessary. Your academic expertise and experience as professors are acutely valuable to this research project. Likewise, your input is immensely respected because of your involvement in discipleship and spiritual direction ministries. I am honored that you have agreed to serve in this manner.

Any suggestions or comments you may have to help improve the collection of data will be helpful and appreciated. When you have completed the review, kindly sign and email them to me at mMinnie.anderson@asburyseminary.edu by July 2, 2022.

Thank you for assisting me with this project.

Best Regards,

Rev. Minnie Anderson

For Expert Review**Ministry Project Title: Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders****The Nature and Purpose of the Project:**

This project emerged from a desire to see Christian women who are leaders in their churches, and who have suffered from domestic abuse in silence for centuries grow spiritually as disciples of Christ. The domestic abuse women experienced generally occurred at the hands of a husband or significant other. This population attended worship services regularly and many were continually active in ministries. Yet, these Christian women, out of fear, remained silent and refused to advocate for rights or respond to the call of God.

Regardless of their experiences, women must be taught how to overcome the barriers that inhibited their spiritual journey. Barriers that can be a hindrance to ministry may also be embedded in Christian traditions. Jesus was empowered to heal and set at liberty the brokenhearted, those who are inconsolable and are captives to sin, Satan, and the law” (Luke 4:18) (E. Peterson). Through the spiritual direction process, these women were empowered to overcome barriers that hindered their spiritual transformation.

The purpose of this research was to measure the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, among adult Christian women from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community who have suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

Expert Review**Research Questions:***Research Question #1:*

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living, were identified before the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Research Question #2

What levels of spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living were identified following the eight-week experience of spiritual direction among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Research Question #3

What aspect of the eight-week experience of spiritual direction had the greatest impact on the observed changes in spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from Orangeburg, South Carolina who suffered domestic abuse?

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Abuse covers the unkind and pugnacious treatment of another person. Abuse is the process of taking advantage of and mistreating another person. The forms of violence against women are numerous, controversial, international, and cross-cultural (Cooper-White, Introduction viii).

The Oregon Domestic Violence Council defines abuse as, A pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship. These behaviors include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Tactics of coercion, terrorism, degradation, exploitation, and violence function as instruments to engender fear in the victim to enforce compliance (Ron Clark 5).

Biblical Theology is systematic, ordered, and reasoned interpretation and application of what Scripture reveals about the Trinity to the believer for spiritual transformation by faith (Eph. 4:12). It reveals the promises of God to believers through the ministry of Christ (Hays 113). For Thomas Oden, biblical theology begins with the living God and his relationship with his living church through the ministry of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Oden, Preface xxv).

The Church is a community of believers called by God and redeemed by the Holy Spirit who through the ministry of Christ on the cross, receives the following character – “one body,” united by “one spirit;” having “one faith, one hope, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all” (John Wesley, sermon *Of The Church* #14). The church allows for the preaching of the gospel of Christ and the administration of the sacraments (Collins 238). Oden agrees with Collin’s definition however, he includes its responsibility for discipline (Preface x).

Dispositional Living is the outward-bound body of Christ functioning through the means of grace. It is an intentional act of believers to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3-4; Fowl 133). Paul urges Christians to lead a life that reflects their call to live in unity and love (Eph. 4:1). As Christians live in unity they will thrive and bless others (Hays 253, 257; Fowl 22).

Holy Love addresses the moral character of God (Oden 62). It refers to an act of grace by God towards his creation. Holy relates to the holiness of God. It also refers to the perfection of God, which believers seek to attain—it is their goal in life (Collins 21). Holy love denotes the work the Holy Spirit does in the heart of humans.

Spiritual Direction is the journey towards wholeness which is becoming the image of Christ and is the goal for all believers. This process requires discerning, which is the heart of spiritual direction, the will of God for spiritual transformation. Ruth Barton writes, “The preparation is actually more important than the process” (14).

Spiritual Transformation initiates with regeneration and progresses towards Christian perfection. The act of spiritual transformation encompasses an inner and outer process of transformation into the image of Christ. Outwardly, a person’s relationships allow for spiritual growth and are also a method of evaluating a person’s spiritual life (Mulholland 51).

For Expert Review

Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys

Instructions: This survey proposes to evaluate the spiritual transformation in relation to biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women who have suffered domestic abuse prior to attending an eight-week spiritual discipleship session to measure the change in their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. There are no right, or wrong answers so please respond honestly.

Part 1: Demographic Information

Please complete the demographic section. Your information will be held in strict confidence.

I. Age: 18-29__ 30-39__ 40-49__ 50-59__ 60 and above__ (please specify)____

II. Ethnic Group: African American __ Asian__ Hispanic/Latino__ White__

III. Country of origin _____ US Citizen? Yes__ No__

IV. Are you a resident of Orangeburg County? Yes__ No__

V. City currently residing: _____

VI. Marital Status: Married__ Widowed__ Divorced__ Single__ Other__ (please specify)_____

VII. I am a parent of a child under the age of 18: Yes__ No__ How many children? ____

VIII. Years you have been a Christian 1-5__ 6-10__ 11+__ Please specify _____

IX. Involvement in your local church: Pastor__ Ministry Leader__ Other _____

Please specify are: _____

X. What denomination are you affiliated with? __ Catholic __ Protestant __ Non-

Denominational __ Other (please specify) _____

Part 2: Instrumentation
Pre- and Post-Surveys for RQ #1 and RQ #2

The following statements are measured by a four-point interval scale:

1 (Strongly Disagree) 2 (Disagree) 3 (Agree) 4 (Strongly Agree)

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I believe God will forgive all my sins.				
2. I attend small discipleship groups regularly.				
3. I believe God is Trinitarian in nature, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.				
4. I pray regularly for the well-being of those with whom I have a difficult relationship.				
5. I believe Bible reading is a necessary discipline.				
6. I believe I can be a faithful follower of Christ and not be rooted in a Christian community.				
7. I believe my life reflects orthodox biblical values.				
8. I take the initiative in asking for forgiveness and seek reconciliation when I have wronged someone else.				
9. When I feel fear or anxiety, my first response is to seek God or reach out to him.				
10. I believe if I do good things, God will give me a good life.				
11. I often talk negatively about others.				
12. Reading the Bible helps me feel a connection with God.				
13. I am very confident that God loves me.				
14. Having a personal relationship with God does not require any human community.				

15. Taking personal and practical steps to care for the environment is important to me.				
16. I believe something is a sin only if it hurts another person.				
17. I demonstrate patience with those who are in my care (children, patients, clients, subordinate co-workers, dependents) as well as those with whom I do not need to have a relationship (e.g., telemarketers, cashiers, servers).				
18. I experience God's presence through reading the Scriptures.				
19. I take the initiative in working toward reconciliation with those who have wronged me.				
20. I am currently not living at peace with someone (e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, fellow church members, etc.).				
21. I often feel separated from God.				
22. I have been hurt by other Christians.				
23. I experience God's presence through prayer.				
24. I believe Scripture calls me to serve and concretely share my faith with others.				
25. It is important to live a life that increasingly reflects orthodox biblical values.				
26. I experience God's presence through corporate worship.				
27. My relationship with God affects the way I live.				

For Expert Review**Pre- and Post-Surveys Recommendations for RQ #1 and RQ #2**

Questions	Suggestions
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Expert Review**Journal Questions Recommendations for RQ #3****Question #1:**

How have God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit helped you in your spiritual journey?

Evaluation of Question #1	Suggestions:

Question #2

What have you learned from the lesson on “Sin”? How will you use what you have learned in ministry?

Evaluation of Question #2	Suggestions:

Question #3

Using the terms salvation, justification, baptism, and redemption, explain what being in the family of God means to you.

Evaluation of Question #3	Suggestions:

Question #4

Which spiritual disciplines are you currently practicing? What spiritual disciplines are you adding and why?

Evaluation of Question #4	Suggestions:

Question #5

Reflecting on the love of God, how has God shown His love to you? Use at least three Scriptures to support your answer.

Evaluation of Question #5	Suggestions:

Question #6

Why is forgiveness important? What barriers have you faced when forgiving?

Evaluation of Question #6	Suggestions:

Question #7

What is the root of shame and what effect does it have on a person's life?

Evaluation of Question #7	Suggestions:

Question #8

In What ways do you practice "having the mind of Christ?"

Evaluation of Question #8	Suggestions:

Expert Review
Focus Group Post-Intervention Semi-Structured Questions for RQ #3
 (Group participants brought their journals)

1. What will you take away from this experience that can help you in life/ministry?

Evaluation of Question #1	Suggestions:
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2. What was most helpful to you in this eight-week experience? Why?

Evaluation of Question #2	Suggestions:
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3. What was least helpful to you in this eight-week experience? Why?

Evaluation of Question #3	Suggestions:
----------------------------------	---------------------

4. What would you change to improve this eight-week experience? Why?

Evaluation of Question #4	Suggestions:
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5. Can use this discipleship experience in your ministry context? How?

Evaluation of Question #5	Suggestions:
--------------------------------------	---------------------

Review completed by: (Print name) _____

Signature: _____

Date completed: _____

Thank you for your time and academic expertise to help with this ministry!

Appendix F

Participants' Recruitment Email Letter

Dear Sister in Christ:

My name is Rev. Minnie Anderson, and I am a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. I am extending an invitation to you to take part in this important research study to evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual direction for transformation in women who have suffered abuse. You may qualify to participate in the study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are a Christian in good physical and mental health.
2. You are at least 18 years old.
3. You are a resident of Orangeburg, South Carolina and
4. Faithfully attend a church in the Orangeburg community.

You are invited to actively participate in the following:

1. Attend an eight-week spiritual direction class beginning Monday, August 1, 2022, through Monday, September 19, 2022, at the Orangeburg County Library, 1645 Russell Street, Orangeburg, South Carolina. The class sessions will include devotion, bible study, and small group sessions.
2. Maintain a participant's journal throughout the eight-week class sessions.
3. Participate in a confidential participant survey two weeks before the beginning of the class and one week after the conclusion of the class.
4. Participate in a focus group (I available) one (1) week following the conclusion of the class sessions. Participation is voluntary. The interview will be held at the Orangeburg County Library. You are asked to grant Minnie Anderson permission to audio record all sessions and to use your words, insights, and actions as a part of this research project.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary and there is no compensation for participation. However, your acceptance and commitment are greatly appreciated. You are welcome to invite a family member or friend if that person meets the above. If you decide to participate in this research project or if you have questions about the project, please email or contact me at Minnie.anderson@asburyseminary.edu or 803-387-8226. Once you have contacted me, a consent letter will be sent to you for your perusal. If you agree to take part in this important study, please sign the attached consent letter and email it to me. You will not encounter any expenses for participating in this study. All materials needed for the study and snacks will be provided for you.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rev. Minnie Anderson

Appendix G

Participants Informed Consent Letter

Dear Sister in Christ:

My name is Rev. Minnie Anderson, and I am a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. I am extending an invitation to you to take part in this important research study to evaluate the effectiveness of spiritual direction for transformation in women who have suffered abuse. This invitation is being offered to you provided you meet the following requirements:

- You are a Christian.
- You are at least 18 years old.
- You are a resident of Orangeburg, South Carolina, and
- You faithfully attend a church in the Orangeburg community.

You are also consenting to actively participate in the following activities:

1. Attend an eight-week spiritual direction class beginning Monday, August 1, 2022, through Monday, September 19, 2022, at the Orangeburg County Library, 1645 Russell Street, Orangeburg, South Carolina. The class sessions will include devotion, bible study, and small group sessions.
2. Maintain a participant journal throughout the eight-week class sessions.
3. Participate in a confidential survey immediately following the conclusion of the class.
4. Participate in a focus group one (1) week following the conclusion of the class.
5. Give the researcher permission to use your insights, actions, and words.

All information is confidential and will only be used for this research project. To ensure confidentiality, your personal information will be referred to as Participant #1, participant 32, and so forth. All information will be kept in a locked file or on the computer with a secret password. If you are uncomfortable with any part of the eight-week experience, please inform Rev. Minnie Anderson. Please do not answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may leave the research study at any time. No payment or compensation will be given for your participation. Snacks will be served at each session.

By signing below, you agree that you have read this consent letter and of your free will, you are consenting to all the aforementioned information.

Best Regards,

Rev. Minnie Anderson

Appendix H

Letter of Invitation for Session Presenters/Facilitators

Dear Christian Friend:

I am inviting you to be a part of my research project through the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary located in Wilmore, Kentucky, by serving as a Presenter/Worship Leader at a session. The purpose of this research is to measure the spiritual transformation concerning biblical theology, holy love, and dispositional living among adult Christian women from the Orangeburg, South Carolina community who have suffered domestic abuse who attended an eight-week experience of spiritual direction.

The research project initiates with a Discipleship for Leaders Training that will be held from 7:00 PM until 9:00 PM weekly at the Orangeburg County Library, 1645 Russell Street, Orangeburg, South Carolina 29115, beginning Monday, August 1, 2022, through Monday, September 19, 2022. I have enclosed a flyer for your perusal.

As a presenter/worship Leader, I am asking you to prepare a lesson on the assigned topic as it relates to Christian women being trained in spiritual disciplines or to prepare a brief worship experience to aid in their spiritual transformation. Your lesson title is _____ and will be held on _____.

Your identity, the name of your organization, and other identifying information will not be shown in the completed research project. In the completed project, session presenters will be referred to as Session Presenter #1, Session Presenter #2, and so forth. Worship Leaders will be identified as Worship Leader Session #1, Worship Leader Session #2, and so forth. However, the information you shared or provided in this ministry experience will be used in the final research project.

If you decide to take part in this research project or if you have questions about the project, please email or contact me at Minnie.anderson@asburyseminary.edu or 803-387-8226. Once you have contacted me, a consent letter will be sent to you for your perusal. If you agree to participate in this important study, please sign the attached consent letter and email it to me.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary and there is no compensation for participation. However, your acceptance and commitment are greatly appreciated.

Warm Regards,

Rev. Minnie Anderson

Appendix I**Confidentiality Agreement for Session Presenters/Facilitators**

I acknowledge that I fully understand, and I agree of my own free will to accept the invitation to take part in this research study as a ____ Session Presenter, ____ Worship Leader, or ____ Focus Group Facilitator and that I have received a copy of this agreement.

As a part of the research team, I agree to the following:

1. Participate in all training concerning procedures and protocol for teaching the sessions and the use of audio-recording equipment.
2. Utilize the researcher-designed set of questions/worship format.
3. Conduct all interactions with the participants in a private room with a closed door.
4. Respect the privacy of others by not showing or discussing any information shared with anyone except the researcher (s).
5. Assist the principal researcher with various tasks as needed.
6. Destroy any information about this research project.

Name (Print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix J

Research Team Confidential Agreement

I _____, have been hired to assist the principal researcher with the Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders research project as an observer for all sessions and the facilitator of the focus group at the conclusion of the study. I will also help the researcher with the collection, transcribing, theme analysis, interpretation, and coding of the data from the focus group, surveys, and field notes.

I agree to the following:

1. Respect the confidentiality of all research information shared with me and will not share, show, or discuss research information regardless of its form or format except for the researcher (s).
2. Secure all research information after each session.
3. Return all research information to the researcher (s) at the conclusion of the research project.
4. In conjunction with the principal researcher, destroy all research information by shredding or erasing, this includes information stored on hard drives or notes taken during the analysis phase.

Researcher (Print Name)	Signature	Date
-------------------------	-----------	------

Transcriber (Print Name)	Signature	Date
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Appendix K

Weekly Schedule

Date: _____

9:00 AM	Welcome/Greeting
9:05 AM	Devotion/Prayer
9:15 AM	Lesson
10:15 AM	Break
10:30 AM	Group Activity
11:00 AM	Sharing
11:45 AM	Assignments
11:55 AM	Closing Prayer
Noon	Dismissal

Appendix L

Sign In Sheet

Please sign in with your Participant ID

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
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Appendix M

Training Manual

Spiritual Direction: A Discipleship Experience for Christian Leaders

A Spiritual Direction Journey for Spiritual Transformation



I. GOD, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Love is first seen in the Trinity, why is this important?
2. Do you believe God I love? Why?
3. What does Jesus say about his relationship with God?
4. Name 3 characteristics of God.
5. Why are the characteristics of God important? (In Group)
6. What is the relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit with humanity?
7. How do you know God loves you?

II. SIN AND THE FALL

1. Who was the fallen angel? Why?
2. Define sin.
3. How did sin enter the earth? What does that mean for believers today?
4. What does the Bible say about the devil/the accuser?
5. Name a few of the consequences of sin.
6. How does our providential God remind us of his agape love?

III. YOU ARE IN THE FAMILY

1. Define salvation.
2. What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
3. What does the Bible say about women being made in the image (*Imago Dei*) of God?
4. Why is Justification important to the believer? How should believer's response to the accuser?
5. What does baptism symbolize?
6. Why is redemption important to the believer?
7. Can believers live holy lives?

IV. RELEASE THE SHAME

1. What is shame?
2. What is the root of shame?
3. When is the first occurrence of shame in the Bible?
4. Give a reference regarding how God responds to shame in the Old Testament.
5. Give a reference regarding how Jesus responds to shame in the New Testament.
6. What does Scripture say about feeling condemned?
7. What are the consequences of remaining silent? (In group)

V. FORGIVENESS

1. What does forgiveness mean?
2. What does Scripture say about forgiveness?
3. What is the relationship between humility to forgiveness?
4. How can you forgive?
5. Why forgive? (In group)
6. Why is forgiving yourself important?

VI. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: A PATH TO TRANSFORMATION

1. Why do we pray?
2. How does Jesus instruct us to pray?
3. Who is called to intercessory prayer?
4. Why do we fast?
5. How do we fast?
6. Give 3 reasons why Scripture was given to humanity.
7. Do we need the Christian community? Why?
8. What is the role of the church towards believers?
9. When do you feel God's presence?

VII. NOW WHAT?

1. What lessons do we learn from Peter in Matthew 14:22-29?
2. What do you receive from reading this text as it relates to a “calling” from God?
3. Read the text and allow God to speak to you. (Find a quiet place to read the text and come back to share with the group).
4. What do you believe God is calling you to do?
5. How do you keep your dream/vision alive? (In group)
6. What do you believe God is calling you to do? How do you keep your dream/vision alive? (In group)

VIII. REACH OUT, REACH BACK, AND PAY IT FORWARD

1. What does dispositional living mean?
2. Give biblical examples of women who reached out, back, or paid it forward to help another woman. What can we learn from the examples of these women?
3. Hannah, Esther, and Anna lived a contemplative lifestyle; how did it affect their community?
4. How does accountability relate to dispositional living? (In group)
5. Give examples of how you can demonstrate dispositional living.

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