

# *a community called ...*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN EVALUATION OF THE TEEN CHALLENGE PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN ADOLESCENTS**

by

Brian D. Pikalow

The limited purpose of this project was to examine the spiritual change experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. Researchers, parents, and church leaders are deeply concerned about the spiritual disconnectedness, mental problems, and emotional stress among U. S. adolescents. Academic research has explored Teen Challenge and has documented its high drug and alcohol recovery rates. More empirical research is necessary to document and promulgate Teen Challenge's effectiveness in causing spiritual change in teenagers.

The problem is the crisis of deteriorating mental, spiritual, and behavioral health of U. S. children. A grounded theory rising from the research within this dissertation is that Teen Challenge can accept adolescents exhibiting these conditions and can foster change that leads to spiritual understanding, mental stability, and emotional wholeness.

To approximate the parameters of the "grand" experiment, the sampling population was comprised of male and female adolescent participants of the program who have completed it within the past five years. The study demonstrated that the Teen Challenge program is fostering a statistically significant amount of spiritual change on the lives of its graduates.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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AN EVALUATION OF THE TEEN CHALLENGE PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON  
SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN ADOLESCENTS

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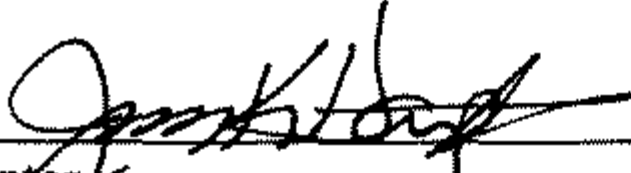
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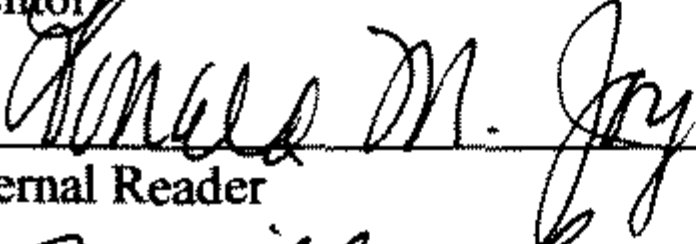
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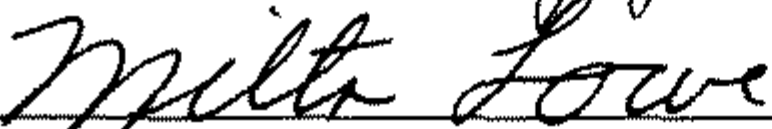
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**AN EVALUATION OF THE TEEN CHALLENGE PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON  
SPIRITUAL CHANGE IN ADOLESCENTS**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

**Brian Dennis Pikalow**

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This work is dedicated to my father, Dennis Pikalow. His courage and perseverance is a testimony to me. No matter what happens in his life, he never quits. I adopted his attitude for this project. The spiritual change that occurred in his life was my inspiration. Another source of inspiration was my three boys: David, Will, and Andrew Pikalow. My greatest fear has been that they will become stereotypical pastor's kids and waste their adolescent years playing church instead of pursuing Jesus. I tackled this project with a vengeance looking for answers before they hit the teenage years. I hope they never need Teen Challenge.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker of the Florida conference of the United Methodist Church comments in his writing that when a Jewish person in the community came to speak to a group of young people at his church about her particular faith, she made this comparison between Judaism and Christianity: “The emphasis in Christianity is upon God’s forgiveness, but we Jews are interested in how God wants us to be good people by obeying God’s law” (4). At first, Bishop Whitaker was offended by her inference that Christianity is a religion that lacks the mature, serious commitment to moral formation that is a central purpose of Judaism, yet he knew that she was in a position to make a comparison between Judaism and Christianity because she was an observant Jew who attended worship in a United Methodist church every Sunday. The message she heard in the United Methodist Church is that Christianity is a somewhat amoral religion; it is a religion preoccupied with the invitation for people to receive divine forgiveness. It is a religion oblivious to the need to provide moral education for its people. These remarks by a Jewish observer caused Bishop Whitaker to reflect upon what the church was doing. He asked himself the question, “Where is the intentional agenda of moral formation in our church?” (4). This question by Bishop Whitaker provides the rationale for engaging the problem through research.

### **Personal Experience**

My father, Dennis Pikalow, experienced a radical spiritual change as a result of Teen Challenge. Two very important events in my life were attended by my dad—drunk. The first event was my high school graduation. The second event was when I preached my first sermon at my new church. Dad was drunk in the congregation.

entire time. When we were engaged, I was an undergraduate wondering what God had in store. Samantha was a single mom during the race to the finish, and she has always had to be the one to suffer when I was completing something for school. The devil seemed to attack whenever a paper or a project was due. In those times it would have been easy for my wife to resist me. Instead she chose to resist the devil, and the devil always fled. Thank you, Jesus. Because of you, all of these people were there for me. Bless them!



That week, God got my father's attention. He received another ticket for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). He lost his executive position of twenty-eight years at a multimillion dollar company. His wife of twenty-two years filed for divorce. His teenage daughter no longer spoke to him. Kenneth Leech says a person must experience a "real crisis" in order for defenses to fall (107). My father was in a real crisis.

So, Dad called again, and the call would change both of our lives forever. He said, "Brian, when I hang up, I am going to kill myself." I did not know that he had just duct-taped a vacuum hose to the tailpipe of his Chevy Blazer, so that he could die in the garage. My blood ran cold and my mind went blank. I broke the silence with these words, "Dad, before you do it, consider what it will do to your grandson and your legacy." I told him I would pray for him, and the phone call was over.

As I waited alone, wondering if I had done the right thing, Dad thought about what I said and he dropped to his knees, alone in the garage. He finally surrendered to the Lord. Teen Challenge uses the phrase "turn it over." He called back and he said, "I'll do it. I'll go to Teen Challenge." Expressions of brokenness, humility, and holy fear were

evident. These changes were welcomed, and they provided a window of opportunity for transformation to occur. I speculate that without the intervention of Teen Challenge, my father would have one day followed through on his suicide threat. Dennis Pikalow entered the Teen Challenge program in December 1997 and completed a year later. When he was in the last phase of the program, I baptized him in a lake in front of his Teen Challenge comrades. Dad was the one person on the planet I thought God could not save. I am glad I was wrong. Hope abounds for dysfunctional and destructive adolescents. If Teen Challenge can ignite spiritual change in my father, spiritual change can occur in the adolescents of the program. Furthermore, this spiritual change may provide valuable insight on transferable principles helpful to parents, pastors, and researchers looking for answers concerning the “crisis” among U. S. children today (*Hardwired to Connect* 69).

I have recommended the Teen Challenge ministry for two teenagers within the past few years. These young people have since graduated from the ministry, and I can draw upon their experiences for valuable insight into the Teen Challenge program for triangulation purposes. Moreover, they each experienced a Christian family, a church youth group, and a Teen Challenge program. What the church youth group could not accomplish, what Christian parenting could not accomplish, the Teen Challenge program accomplished in the lives of these two young people. They were transformed from violent, drug-abusing, disobedient children into well-mannered individuals who desire a relationship with Jesus Christ and with those family members they once hated. At the time of this writing, their graduation from Teen Challenge is two years removed, and the staying power of their transformation is observable. The literature review shows that the claim of spiritual change within this program is real.

## **Understanding the Problem**

The problem confronted in this study is the crisis of deteriorating mental, spiritual, and behavioral health of U. S. children. According to the *Hardwired to Connect* report, children are not growing up to be productive adults. “Research suggests that about half of all U. S. teens engage in behaviors that moderately or seriously threaten their ability to become functioning adults” (69). The purpose of this dissertation was to document empirically that Teen Challenge receives some of the most broken and dysfunctional adolescents in the country and produces young people who are spiritually mature for their age. According to the dissertation submitted by Dr. Jeryl Nance for Barry University, little research has been done on the effectiveness of the Teen Challenge program (“Evaluation” 9). The Teen Challenge graduates interviewed for this dissertation may provide some answers to the crisis highlighted in the *Hardwired to Connect* report, which was published by the Institute for American Values in conjunction with the YMCA and Dartmouth Medical School. The report was given by the Commission on Children at Risk, a group of thirty-three children’s doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals. The commission’s principal investigator was Dr. Kathleen Kovner Kline of Dartmouth Medical School. The report spanned the philosophical and political spectrum to argue for the importance of a new public policy and social science concept: authoritative communities (7).

A film producer describes the problem among today’s youth:

For too long, young people have been told that their greatest problems are drugs, sex, alcohol, etc. These are, in fact, only symptoms of a much greater disease. The disease of youth is that their key relationships are in disarray...their relationships with God, self, parents, friends, and the world. (Malcolm 77)

The key word is disarray. Without the structure of social institutions, young people do not know where to obtain social capital. Author Robert D. Putnam describes the importance of social capital in the following manner:

The absence of positive norms, community associations, and informal adult friendships and kin networks leaves kids to their own devices. It is in such settings that youths are most likely to act on shortsighted or self-destructive impulses. It is in such settings too that youths are most prone to create their own social capital in the form of gangs or neighborhood “crews.” (312)

The mentioning of gangs is important. The Teen Challenge ministry began as a response to gang violence. Within the structure of Teen Challenge is an understanding of the human desire for gang behavior, which allows them to respond to teenagers at their worst and lead them to behave with a new order in their lives.

### **Understanding Teen Challenge**

Teen Challenge for adolescents is a fifteen-month residential program emphasizing Christ-centered rehabilitation for life-controlling issues. The basic assumption of Teen Challenge is that those who enter the program are exhibiting sinful behavior linked to feelings of meaninglessness. With some, a lack of meaning may have turned them toward drugs. With others, stress, experimentation, peer pressure, or various other causes may have motivated the initial plunge. Teen Challenge assumes that meaning dissipates as one's life becomes restricted to those activities leading to the acquisition or use of drugs. This assumption separates Teen Challenge from other treatment centers. Teen Challenge would never ask an individual why he or she takes drugs. The word “therapy” is not in the Teen Challenge vocabulary. Comparing Teen Challenge to other treatment centers is beyond the scope of this study, albeit treatment center participation and effectiveness are included in the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

The major purpose of the Teen Challenge program is to induce a personal experience with Christ. Teen Challenge programs are designed to implement a high level of discipline in a supportive environment, teach from a Judeo-Christian perspective, and utilize pastoral counselors to supervise and provide guidance (Nance, "Evaluation" 9). The connection to deep spiritual meaning sparks a desire to develop social capital in ways that enhance the spiritual formation of the individual. Social capital is a reservoir of deep, intimate, and powerful relationships that lead to positive and spiritual responses to the crises of life. To spark the desire for social capital in the participants, Teen Challenge removes all social capital upon entry into the program. For example, at the Bonifay, Florida, facility participants are not allowed to talk for the first three to four months in the program (see Appendix F). However, to say that conversion to Christ is compulsory oversimplifies the process. Teen Challenge does not punish participants for not converting to Christ. Teen Challenge counselors do not frown upon participants for not converting to Christ. Furthermore, the program is too long and too demanding for an adolescent to falsify a conversion.

Upon conversion to faith in Christ, social capital is presented through a wide range of adjunctive therapy: work, group and individual counseling, music, sports, and recreation. The curriculum includes academic, vocational, and religious training. Social capital is used as rewards for exhibiting good behavior in the program.

Rehabilitation is based on a three-phase residential program. For adolescents, academics are provided year-round through a self-paced Christian curriculum referred to by the participants in this study as "PSNC." This term represents the title "Personal Studies for New Christians." In order to move from phase I to phase II in the adolescent program, a participant must go before an ad hoc group of counselors and peers and recite

information from the PSNC curriculum. The adolescent programs in this study had a phase I lasting approximately four months. Although the phases of the adult programs are different in timeframe and method, the goal of the phases seem to be universal throughout all Teen Challenge programs. The adult phases are outlined by LeRoy Gruner of Northern Kentucky University in his research project (180):

- **Phase I—Orientation (first month)** focuses on the conversion-catharsis experience. This phase instills discipline, develops Christian character, and helps residents gain insight into themselves and their problems.
- **Phase II—Training (second-eighth months)** sometimes begins by transferring the resident to one of several training centers specifically designed for providing work training and vocational guidance. In other cases, a center has the facilities to conduct the three-phase program on location. Phase II develops intellectual, spiritual, and emotional maturity, and gives increased freedom and opportunity for community involvement.
- **Phase III—Reentry (ninth-twelfth months)** assists residents in getting established in a “normal” church and community relationship, helps in restoring or establishing homes, offers guidance in job procurement, further education, and family responsibility, and provides continued reference-group support.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The limited purpose of this project was to examine the spiritual change experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. Researchers, parents, and church leaders are deeply concerned about the spiritual disconnectedness, mental problems, and emotional distress among U. S. adolescents. Academic research has explored Teen Challenge and has documented its high drug and alcohol recovery rates. Little, if any,

empirical research has been conducted specifically on Teen Challenge's effectiveness in causing spiritual change in teenagers, thereby affecting their spiritual understanding, mental health, and emotional wholeness.

### **Research Questions**

The present study examined individual experiences of spiritual change by looking at what led to the change, the occurrence of the change itself, the consequences of the change, and how the culture and systems surrounding the participants effected the change. To evaluate Teen Challenge's ability to foster spiritual change, the instruments used provided data to answer three basic questions.

#### **Research Question 1**

What is the spiritual formation profile of adolescents exiting Teen Challenge?

#### **Research Question 2**

What spiritual changes are observed by the adolescents as they progress through the Teen Challenge program that led to the spiritual formation profile in Research Question 1?

#### **Research Question 3**

What elements of the Teen Challenge program, if any, can be correlated to these spiritual changes?

### **Definition of Terms**

Before proceeding with further discussion, I now define terminology I used within the context of this dissertation. Where differences in interpretation may occur, the reader can employ the following explanations to provide insight into my perspective.

## **Adolescent**

In his dissertation on Teen Challenge, Dr. Jeryl Nance, CEO of the Southeast Region of Teen Challenge USA and President of Global Teen Challenge, defines adolescence in this way:

According to Van Rensburg, Landman, and Bodenstein, adolescence can be seen as “the years of becoming sexually mature during early manhood/womanhood. A characteristic of adolescence is a great deal of uncertainty and confusion, as the individual is not yet an adult but no longer a child” (308). According to Plug, Louw, Gouws, and Mayer “an adolescent is a person in the developmental stage, which spans from puberty up to, and including adulthood” (7). Adolescence occurs approximately between ages 12 to 18 years in girls, and in boys, between 13 and 21 years of age. (“Evaluation” 12)

In Figure 2.1 (p.31), Erik H. Erickson labels adolescence as the psychosocial crisis of identity verses identity diffusion (“Erikson’s Theory”). The adolescent is newly concerned with how he or she appears to others. While Erickson and the authors noted in Nance’s dissertation provide a helpful backdrop for understanding the uncertainty and confusion of adolescence, for the purpose of this study an adolescent is defined as an individual between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years and the word is used strictly as an age descriptor.

## **Spiritual Change**

Moral formation is about striving for values and adhering to those values.

Spiritual change, for the purposes of this study, is about developing and maintaining a relationship with a personal, transcendent God who revealed himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the Apostle Paul and the early Church, the spiritual person included the mind, the body, and the spirit (Babcock 13). For John Wesley, spiritual change was the nurturing and training of Christian disciples, thus moral formation is a subset of spiritual change. The interwoven nature of morality and



spirituality can be seen in the national spiritual renewal of eighteenth-century England. Wesley's techniques for nurturing and training Christian disciples not only brought personal transformation to tens of thousands of individual working-class believers but a moral reformation to the nation as well (Henderson 11).

### **Spiritual Maturity**

In order to measure this important variable, a spiritually mature person must be defined with quantifiable terms. A spiritually mature person articulates core values of a biblical worldview with both mouth and lifestyle. A spiritually mature person develops and maintains a relationship with God in regard to spiritual disciplines. According to G. Allport's Religious Orientation Inventory (ROI), religious or spiritual maturity consists of the following ingredients (47):

- Being conscious of the complexity of religion and of the need to examine it,
- Being able to articulate one's beliefs,
- Having one's religion serve as the master motive for moral life,
- Being able to deal with life's crucial questions by using religion to find

functional answers,

- Showing tolerance and harmony within an integrated religion, and
- Having a commitment that allows for modification of one's beliefs.

### **Graduation**

The term graduation for the purposes of this study refers to the ceremony at Teen Challenge marking the reinsertion of a participant into society.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital is a reservoir of deep, intimate, and powerful relationships. When provided by authoritative communities, the reservoir leads to positive and spiritual

responses to the crises of life. When the adolescent is left alone to create social networks, these networks usually foster shortsighted and self-destructive impulses.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation in participant-observation methodology refers to bringing together data from multiple sources to get at the greatest understanding of the people being studied (Hersch ix). Another word for triangulation within a qualitative study is cross-validation. Triangulation assesses the sufficiency of the data according to the convergence of multiple data sources or multiple data-collection procedures (Wiersma and Jurs 256). For the purposes of this study, it refers to the addition of outside literature, both popular and academic, to the researcher's own experience and the observations emerging from the study itself.

### **Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory is a theory that develops from the data rather than from some preconceived idea, notion, or system (Wiersma and Jurs 14). Qualitative research does not emphasize the presence of a theory; therefore, a theory may or may not develop as the research is conducted.

### **Ministry Intervention**

In this study, I chose to examine selected adolescents who had successfully graduated from the Teen Challenge program in order to determine what, if any, spiritual change was experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. Specifically, I interviewed seventeen former adolescent participants recently graduated from the program, as well as thirteen adults (a parent, mentor, sibling, etc.), one for each of the first thirteen participants (P1-P13) who knew the adolescent both prior to their participation in Teen

Challenge and after exiting the program. Through the interviews, I sought to discover what types of self-reported spiritual changes the adolescents may have experienced and to which the adults gave witness in the adolescents' lives. Interviews were conducted by phone with students from several different Teen Challenge facilities. These interviews were then analyzed to discover what commonalities, differences, and general themes emerged and how these related to the goals and practices of Teen Challenge.

### **Context**

The context of the study encompassed five Teen Challenge facilities located in the following places: Bonifay, Florida; Seale, Alabama; Jupiter, Florida; Lakeland, Florida; and, Vero Beach, Florida. These facilities fall under the auspices of Teen Challenge of Florida, Incorporated. Teen Challenge of Florida, Incorporated, falls under the auspices of Teen Challenge USA. The facilities for this study were selected according to the following criteria:

1. These facilities graciously provided adolescent contacts for the study. I could not contact the adolescents directly without their permission and their help.
2. These facilities are all under the same governing umbrella within Teen Challenge, the Southeast Region, so the directors of these particular facilities are networked together and work for the same CEO with the same core values.

#### **Bonifay Facility**

The Teen Challenge male juvenile facility located in Bonifay, Florida, was established in 1999. It has a one hundred-bed capacity. This facility was described by more than one participant in this study as a faith-based "military academy." The executive directors of this facility are Dave and Barbara Rutledge. This facility is a working ranch out in the country.

**Seale Facility**

The Teen Challenge female juvenile facility located in Seale, Alabama, was established in 2002. It has a seventy-bed capacity. It is also known as "Columbus Girls" or Yuchi. The executive directors are Bob and Karla Lee. This facility is located on a former country club property on a private lake.

**Jupiter Facility**

The Teen Challenge female juvenile facility located in Jupiter, Florida, was established in 2004. It has a twenty-two-bed capacity. The executive directors are Greg and Essie DelValle. This facility is not as large as the others, but one of its unique offerings is that the girls participate in Rugby competitions.

**Lakeland Facility**

The Teen Challenge female juvenile facility located in Lakeland, Florida, was established in 2002. It has a forty-five-bed capacity. The executive directors are Tom and Jennifer Asbury. This four-acre facility is located among an upscale residential community, and they have a screened-in pool, outdoor volleyball court, and an intercampus soccer team.

**Vero Beach Facility**

The Teen Challenge male juvenile facility located in Vero Beach, Florida, was established in 2002. It has a forty-bed capacity. The executive director is Maynard Sweigard. This facility is located in a beautiful beach community, and they have a drag racing team.

More than one participant in this study said that if the participant does not follow the rules at this facility, the person is shown a video of living conditions at the Bonifay facility and is told that he will be transferred there if behavior does not improve.

According to Marilyn McGraw, Administrative Assistant to the CEO and COO for Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc., a participant must want to be at Teen Challenge in order for the program to be effective:

The beauty of our centers is that they are autonomous...what they have in common is the curriculum and the basic premise that change only happens from the inside out. Teen Challenge is for the person who wants it, not that needs it. The common denominator [among the diverse facilities of the Southeast Region] is the principles of Teen Challenge.

According to the article "Investigating Teen Challenge," the success rates highlighted in the literature review are inflated because only people who like Teen Challenge remain in Teen Challenge long enough to graduate. This argument is flawed. The program is so rigorous that only those who truly *desire* to be free of their addictions and life-destroying behavior can survive it.

### **Methodology**

The documented success rate of the Teen Challenge ministry for drug and alcohol recovery and assumed success rate of the Teen Challenge ministry for facilitating spiritual change form the backdrop for this study of adolescent participants.

### **Population and Participants**

The sampling population was comprised of male and female adolescent participants of the program (under the auspices of Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc.) who have completed the program within the past two years. While variations exist among the Teen Challenge centers, the curriculum, rules, and general program structure among the sites are uniform. One can assume, then, for the purposes of this study that the degree of confounding between the nature of Teen Challenge itself and other variables such as individual site or staff characteristics is minimal. The centers that were chosen for the study were selected for the ease of data collection.

## **Instrumentation**

The research for this study was qualitative in nature. This study was evaluative in the descriptive mode. It employed a researcher-constructed, semi-structured, open-ended interview inspired by the Spiritual Growth Inventory assessment used by Brian D. Babcock to measure the impact of spiritual formation curriculum at Northeastern Seminary (184).

## **Variables**

The dependent variable was the spiritual growth experienced by the attendees as a result of their participation. The age of the subjects was considered an intervening variable. Rehabilitation was not considered a research variable. A number of nuisance variables influenced the outcomes of any data collected by the assessment instruments. These were kept in mind as the project proceeded, and consideration was given them in the interpretation of the outcomes. Among these intervening variables was the subjective nature of spiritual and personal formation. Everyone's idea of spiritual maturity is subjective. Some will be more optimistic about the changes they have experienced while others will be more discouraged about the level of change, even if that change has been considerable.

Consideration had to be given to the age range of the participants. A thirteen-year-old may have a much harder time answering questions and examining his or her experiences than would an eighteen-year-old. An additional nuisance variable is the reality of each participant's home life. Teen Challenge may have fostered great spiritual change in the young person, but if the adolescent returned home to an environment that was abusive, violent, and resistant to the changes that took place while at Teen Challenge, then the changes may not have sustainability.

One independent variable to consider was the controlling nature of phase one of the Teen Challenge program. At no time during this phase is the adolescent free from intervening influences on spiritual change. Another independent variable is Teen Challenge itself. At no time is the adolescent free to leave the program. Once the adolescent turns eighteen, he or she is free to leave.

### **Data Collection**

I began by calling Teen Challenge facilities and requesting permission to conduct the study. These phone calls led to a lunch meeting with Dr. Jerry Nance, CEO of the Southeast Region of Teen Challenge USA and President of Global Teen Challenge. The meeting was held on 11 October 2007, and Dr. Nance encouraged and enlisted the program directors at various Teen Challenge facilities in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama to participate. Because the participants under investigation were adolescents while in Teen Challenge, the ministry could not release contact information to me. The program directors called graduates using convenience sampling. If the young person was still an adolescent at the time of the interview, permission was requested from the parents for “release of story” (see Appendix D).

Once seventeen participants and thirteen adults were identified and secured for the study, the directors mailed them the consent form (see Appendix E). The participants then contacted me, and we set an appointment for the one-hour face-to-face interview (see Appendix A). In order to secure thirty interviews, I asked five Teen Challenge directors to conduct twenty mailings each for a total of one hundred consent forms.

Careful attention was given to the data because it was qualitative in nature. Each telephone interview was digitally recorded. Handwritten letters from my father, written while he was in Teen Challenge, were kept in the same file for over a decade (see

Appendix C). Adults who knew the participants before and after their Teen Challenge experience were interviewed for triangulation; these adults confirmed or refined data given by the participants. The encoding filter used was not to begin the research with a preset of code words but to allow the code words to percolate to the surface from researcher observation of the interviews. This pattern allowed the participants and adults to provide the descriptors.

Because of the nature of qualitative data, data must be triangulated. My observations of Teen Challenge graduates over the years, my observations of a close family member before and after the Teen Challenge experience, my observations at numerous Teen Challenge events, and letters from my father sent while in the program all served to validate the findings.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

This study was limited to adolescents participating in the Teen Challenge program. Programs operated by Teen Challenge are designed to provide care for adolescents and young adults with life-controlling problems. Programs for adults are generally directed toward addiction recovery, while programs for adolescents focus on behavioral issues (Nance, "Evaluation" 9). Teen Challenge was founded by David Wilkerson in 1958 and is headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. Each region has its own headquarters, CEO/President, and volunteer board of directors. Three Teen Challenge titles exist at the highest level: (1) Teen Challenge USA, (2) Teen Challenge International, and (3) Global Teen Challenge. McGraw said that Global Teen Challenge is completely autonomous from Teen Challenge USA. Furthermore, she did not mention Teen Challenge International, which leads me to believe that the term "International" has been dropped from the name Teen Challenge when Global Teen Challenge was founded,



and now two entities exist: (1) Teen Challenge USA and (2) Global Teen Challenge.

Global Teen Challenge was founded in 1995 by Don Wilkerson, David's brother. Some Teen Challenge Web sites say Teen Challenge, some say Teen Challenge USA, and still others possess the Teen Challenge International name. Because none of the Web sites I visited make a strong delineation between these titles, and because all of them claim the 86 percent recovery rate of Teen Challenge, for the purpose of the study the entity being studied is Teen Challenge USA and henceforth shall be referred to as Teen Challenge. Generalizable features across the country and across adolescent and adult programs do exist.

Teen Challenge has adult treatment centers, but no adult participant was interviewed. Because the 86 percent recovery rate discussed in the literature review was for adults, and marked differences between the adult and adolescent programs exist, this study focused on the spiritual change occurring in the adolescent programs only. The unique characteristic of Teen Challenge participants that cannot be generalized outside of the program is their addiction to alcohol or drugs.

The methodology of this study is limited because of my limited knowledge of the ethos and culture of Teen Challenge. I have preached at Teen Challenge chapels, so I have seen the transforming power of their worship services. I have visited one Teen Challenge facility on a monthly basis for a year. I have had numerous phone conversations with counselors and staff at one Teen Challenge facility. These contacts will facilitate triangulation, but these contacts were ten years ago, which limits how much effect these contacts will have on triangulation. I had no direct contact with a Teen Challenge adolescent facility before the research commenced. The multilayered and highly complex social structure of the adolescent world at Teen Challenge may make

some generalizations tenable at best. Stories, rumors, fights—nearly every aspect of adolescent life—filters through the social network of the program and morphs from objective truth into a form of cultural narrative. However, I visited a men's Teen Challenge facility on a monthly basis for one year, and I traveled with Teen Challenge participants to a rally and to an outreach as an embedded observer. These experiences provide triangulation data.

The complexity of the human personality makes any and every study somewhat limited. Adolescents are people in transition and wildly complicated as a population. The core assumption of science, even social science, is that knowing is obtained through observation and controlled repetition. This assumption is greatly tested in the fire of human interaction and relationship (Clark 195).

This study does not attempt to show differences between Teen Challenge and the youth ministry paradigm within a typical local church. However, the research results should provide insight to public and elected officials, as well as to parents and pastors, who are concerned with the positive outcomes generated by authoritative communities. This study may also provide insight to Teen Challenge leaders who are concerned with the effectiveness of their program to foster spiritual change. The leaders with whom I conversed are well aware of the 86 percent recovery rate of the ministry, but they are not as aware of the spiritual change rate reported by graduates.

The Bonifay, Florida, facility is the only Teen Challenge center out of the programs surveyed by this study where participants can be placed there against their will; furthermore, it is a faith-based "military academy" rather than a faith-based treatment center. After reviewing the data, the main difference can be boiled down to the strict ethos and structure, the very descriptors used most by respondents as facilitating spiritual

change in all five Teen Challenge programs in this study. The effectiveness of this programming philosophy is highlighted by Dr. Michele McKnight Baker:

There's only so much running away and hiding from yourself and other people that you can do. The schedule's so tight that you're forced to be with people most of the day.... You have to drop the wall and start to get real with somebody, because there's no place to hide. Somebody's there *all* the time. (195)

At the Bonifay, Florida, center, sections of the day are regimented in a cadence, some by the minute. One of the respondents (P16) provided a detailed summary of what happens in a typical day this particular Teen Challenge, and his summary is included in Appendix F.

### **Ethics of the Study**

Teen Challenge has very specific guidelines governing their attendees' interaction with pastors, parents, and with the public. It required special permission from the Teen Challenge leadership in order to conduct the study. This study was designed in compliance with the carefully defined Teen Challenge guidelines that protect their residents. With the exception of three interviews, each interview was conducted via telephone. The participant knew ahead of time that the conversation was being recorded with a digital voice recorder and that the conversation would remain anonymous and confidential. The participant signed a release of story (see Appendix D) from Teen Challenge and a participant certification form (see Appendix E).

This qualitative study has answered the call to investigate Teen Challenge by trying to determine whether it is successful in creating spiritual change as it assists participants to overcome various addictions. One call for the investigation comes from an antagonistic source:

**Investigating Teen Challenge: Please post your experiences on the only blog that makes an attempt to prove that the Teen Challenge program**

needs to be investigated!... (Claims of high success rates and high drop-out rates ... are what sparked this investigation.) (“Investigating Teen Challenge”)

Chapter 2 lays the theological, biblical, and sociological framework for this study by looking at the existing literature on Teen Challenge as well as describing spiritual maturity. Chapter 3 describes the design of the study. The results of the study are published in Chapter 4 while Chapter 5 provides a summary of major conclusions, indicates major implications, and suggests further avenues for research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

#### Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to document empirically that Teen Challenge is able to help broken and dysfunctional adolescents become young people who are emotionally and spiritually mature for their age.

On 31 May 1999, in the wake of the April massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, Lance Morrow in a *Time* essay commented on the problem of disconnectedness:

Humans ... have turned the long stretch from puberty to autonomy into a suspended state of simultaneous overindulgence and neglect. American adolescence tends to be disconnected from the adult world and from the functioning expectation (the hope, the obligation) of entering that world and assuming a responsible place there. The word adolescence means, literally, growing up. There is no growing up if there is nothing to grow up to. Without adult connection, adolescence becomes a neverland, a Mall of Lost Children. (110)

Scholars at the National Research Council in 2002 estimated that at least one of every four adolescents in the U. S. is currently at serious risk of not achieving productive adulthood (Eccles and Gootman). Given the adverse outcomes to which children are exposed by failing to connect, one can reason that developing healthy social connections would be as understandable to the average person as eating a healthy diet. This study attempts to respond to the call within *Hardwired to Connect* for an examination of the extent to which youth organizations meet the ten basic criteria for authoritative community:

- It is a social institution that includes children and youth.
- It treats children as ends in themselves.
- It is warm and nurturing.

- It establishes clear limits and expectations.
- The core of its work is performed largely by nonspecialists.
- It is multigenerational.
- It has a long-term focus.
- It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of how to define a good person.
- It encourages spiritual and religious development.
- It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor (48).

### **Theological Foundation**

Certain biblical stories of a mentor/protégé or father/son example show dysfunction in the relationship. For example, Joseph's father Jacob (Israel) planted the seed that led to Joseph's trials. Jacob allowed his feelings for Joseph to show enough to cause dissention among his siblings (Gen. 37:3).

In modern Western society, technology has allowed the pace of life, knowledge, and the population to increase. These three increases have led to reductionism. Didactic training, even within the Church, gets reduced to verbal impartation of truth in sound bites. A young person cannot learn how to ride a bike simply by being told how to do so. He or she must experience the challenge and thrill of trying it for himself or herself. The same is true for spiritual formation. The Church and parents within Western culture have tended to reduce biblical, theological, and relational training to telling without saturating the person through relationship and experiences. The Bible is explicit about saturation:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on our hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the

doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deut. 11:18-21, NIV)

The mode of teaching among the Israelites was chiefly oral (Jamieson). They were enjoined to instruct their children from infancy in the Decalogue and other principal parts of the law by speaking on every suitable occasion (Isa. 28:9). Adolescents in modern Western society do not have time for saturation, as many researchers have documented. In his research, Tom W. Smith states that religious interest is under attack:

Religious faith and practice in American teenagers' lives operate in a social and institutional environment that is highly competitive for time, attention, and energy. Religious interests and values in teens' lives typically compete against those of school, homework, television, other media, sports, romantic relationships, paid work, and more. Indeed, in many adolescents' lives, religion occupies a quite weak and often losing position among those competing influences. Those teenagers for whom religious faith and practice are important tend to have religious lives constructed relationally and institutionally to intersect and overlap with other important aspects of their lives... For American adolescents more broadly, the structure of relational networks and institutional ties of both teens and their parents seems significantly correlated with the character of their religious faith and practice. (28)

A research gap exists on what methods and practices of adolescent didactic training is *working* in Christian circles. On one hand, speculation could lead to a conclusion that religious institutions and ministries spark and cultivate healthy religious faith. On the other hand, conclusions could show healthy religious faith is what sparked and cultivated the adolescent's desire to be involved in relational and institutional religious environments.

Robert Putnam is a key figure in the stream of research. He tested his hypothesis that higher levels of social connectedness correlate with significantly better outcomes for children and youth. He referenced the Annie E. Casey Foundation's ten leading indicators

of child well-being for 1999 and the Foundation's research based on those indicators, which was carried out on a state-by-state basis. Putnam and his colleagues then developed their own list of fourteen leading indicators of social connectedness, which they called the Social Capital Index (296-97). The following is what he discovered: "Statistically, the correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analyses of this sort" (297).

Putnam advanced the term social capital. The term is now widely used by economists, sociologists, and others to describe the benefits of social relationships and social networks. Social capital is a reservoir of deep, intimate, and powerful relationships which the adolescent is able to develop. When fostered by authoritative communities, the reservoir leads to positive and spiritual responses to the crises of life. It is a term derived from the field of economics (*Hardwired to Connect* 65).

Teen Challenge has been researched for its effectiveness by comparing its adult recovery rates to other treatment centers. Empirical evidence was not readily available on the extent of spiritual change in the program. Little research has been done on the effectiveness of Teen Challenge juvenile programs (Nance, "Evaluation" 9). Documented empirical evidence suggests that Teen Challenge is an effective authoritative community for adolescents, therefore more research should be conducted.

### **Weakening of Social Institutions**

Authors William Willimon and Robert L. Wilson tell how the United Methodist Church, like many denominations, has lost its influence on young people:

One of our current sources of membership loss is our inability to retain our young people, after their maturity, in our church. When they become adults, too many of our children leave the United Methodist Church for other denominations, while others drop out of the church altogether. Decades of haphazard Christian education, the ethics of cultural



accommodation, non-biblical preaching, and the neglect of the task of formation have left us with a bitter harvest. (42)

Willimon is now a bishop in the United Methodist Church, and his quote about the neglect of the task of formation has the same ring as Bishop Whitaker's statement (see Chapter 1). Two highly respected and powerful leaders of a large Christian denomination emphasize the lack of a spiritual formation plan for its young people. If Christian parents were asked what their plan was for spiritual formation, the answer would be, "What plan?"

The notion that the church as an institution is in peril is not new. According to Phillip W. Sell of Talbot School of Theology, after graduating summa cum laude from Dallas Theological Seminary, Lawrence O. Richards moved to Wheaton, Illinois, where from 1962-1965 he was an editor of children's church materials for Scripture Press Publications, a large curriculum house servicing evangelical churches. He was also an associate pastor in charge of Christian education at a local church and taught a large Bible class. During this time Richards began to be disillusioned by the educational program of the church, even to the point of taking his children out of Sunday School (Sell).

Twenty-four civil society scholars and leaders within the past ten years have said, "As an institution, the family's distinguishing trait is its powerful combination of love, discipline, and permanence. Accordingly, families can teach standards of personal conduct that cannot be enforced by law, but which are indispensable traits for democratic civil society" (*Hardwired to Connect* 7). While the importance of the institution of family has gone uncontested for centuries, recent discoveries confirm that the attachment children experience in their families is the essential foundation for the emergence of conscience and of moral meaning. In her empirical study of the development of

conscience, Barbara Stilwell of the Indiana University School of Medicine describes the child's quest for parental approval as the foundation for the emergence of conscience:

“Moralization is a process whereby a value driven sense of oughtness emerges within specific human behavioral systems, namely the systems governing attachment, emotional regulation, cognitive processing, and volition” (qtd. in *Hardwired to Connect* 25). In other words, a sense of right and wrong originates largely from a biologically primed need to connect with others.

In their book, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend reinforce the claim that teenagers are longing for connection:

We cannot overemphasize the importance of developing ... [the] ability to attach. All of the tasks of life are based, at some level, on how attached we are to God and others. Kids who are emotionally connected in healthy ways are more secure. They delay gratification. They respond to discipline. They deal with failure. They make good moral decisions. (69)

Parental approval and disapproval at every suitable occasion facilitate moral development and conscience.

### **Search for Meaning**

The Lord has also hardwired into children the desire to ask big questions about life. Viktor Frankl theorizes that the basic human motivation is a struggle for meaning (97). The intensified search for meaning commonly seen during adolescent years may be, in part, biologically determined given that the brain regions activated during religious experiences, such as the prefrontal cortex, are also among the regions undergoing considerable developmental change during adolescence (*Hardwired to Connect* 32). The desire for meaning is closely linked to attachment through intimacy.

Dr. David Ferguson says that significance, or meaning, flows from intimacy.

When people discover what significant, eternal impact is possible through their lives,

they experience a greater love for Christ than ever dreamed (13). People become cognizant of their personal sense of meaning when people who know them the best respect them the most. Therefore, when those closest are not respectful, meaning can become skewed. Jesus said, “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor” (Matt. 13:57). Jesus is clearly stating that people experience hurt when they are around family: an emotional hurt that occurs when those who know the person the best miss what is best about the person.

Some parents and pastors deal with a teenager’s need for answers through teaching. Studies show that humans are born to attach (Hrdy 393), and this attachment is the essential foundation for the emergence of moral meaning. Evidence suggests that teaching happens best within the confines of healthy social constructs. The inverse is true as well—a youth ministry or family that has community as its foundation devoid of teaching will also be ineffective. Both are needed. However, the busier the family, or the less connected the student feels in the youth ministry, the more irrelevant teaching becomes.

### **Lack of Identity**

A young person’s desire for meaning is closely linked to attachment through intimacy. For the purpose of this study, intimacy relates to how another person views the teenager. Identity is how the teenager views himself or herself. An adolescent’s desire for meaning is also closely linked to identity. Author Chuck Colson tells a story about a parent who says, “Every significant question [a teenager has] leads back to where we start from—our answers to the three perennial questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” (xix). Dr. Les Parrott, III supports this position when

he says that the burning challenge of adolescence is answering the question, "Who am I?" (15).

While identity is about how people view themselves, feedback from others is still critical. According to Erikson, the socialization process consists of eight phases. These stages are conceived in an almost architectural sense: satisfactory learning and resolution of each stage is necessary if the child is to manage the next and subsequent stages satisfactorily ("Erikson's Theory") (see Figure 2.1). Each stage of development includes a crisis which prepares the person for the next stage. How a parent or guardian handles each crisis factors in to the integrity of each building block of identity.

I Infancy	Trust Vs. Mistrust							
II Early childhood		Autonomy Vs. Shame, Doubt						
III Play age			Initiative Vs. Guilt					
IV School age				Industry Vs. Inferiority				
V Adolescence					Identity Vs. Identity Diffusion			
VI Young adult						Intimacy Vs. Isolation		
VII Adulthood							Generativity Vs. Self- absorption	
VIII Mature age								Integrity Vs. Disgust, Despair

Source: "Erikson's Theory."

Figure 2.1. Eight Stages of Development.

## **Observing the Youth Ministry Paradigm**

The vast majority of those involved in youth ministry define the goal of their work as encouraging students to develop a personal, authentic faith in Christ. Dr. Chap Clark claims that this goal is no longer adequate for a youth program (188). Clark insinuates that the word *personal* no longer carries the same connotation. In the past, personal meant that people could not ride the coattails of their parents into heaven. Today, this word implies a journey with Christ that is individualistic.

Authors Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon hyperbolically set the end of Christendom in America on a Sunday evening in 1963. The Fox Theater in Greenville, South Carolina, opened its doors to show a movie on Sunday:

On that night, Greenville, South Carolina—the last pocket of resistance to secularity in the Western world—served notice that it would no longer be a prop for the church. There would be no more free passes for the church, no more free rides. (15-16)

The great irony is that one of the authors slipped out the back door of his youth group and went to see the movie. Although the authors are exercising hyperbole in their statement about the death of Christendom, the statement does reflect a problem with the paradigm, which is keeping the programming interesting enough so participants will keep coming to youth group instead of going to the movies. A driving force of youth ministry programming is the competition with other cultural interests (Jones 72). The Rev. Eugene Peterson, professor of spiritual theology emeritus at Regent College in Vancouver, in his interview “Pastoral Ministry” for Princeton Theological Seminary, contends that a youth pastor’s longevity is key: “What I think is essential is that the pastor is a person who has some responsibility for the gospel in a place. The place is important, and the longer you can stay in that place the better.”

## **Clarifying the Process of Spiritual Formation**

Spirituality can be an evasive term more often defined or shaped by the professional field studying it. Jo Anne Grace, notes in her work that spirituality can connote different meanings for different people:

The behaviorist ... [sees spirituality as] an abiding belief that a positive change is achievable.... The psychotherapist ... [may see it as] an altered state of consciousness that is experienced rather than learned; known rather than believed; lived rather than expounded. It is an attitude rather than a practice; it encourages individuality and a loving acceptance of life, self and others.... An ethicist ... [may see it as] concern with that which is valued and how it is valued.... A philosopher ... [may see it as] a life principle that pervades a person's entire being. (1-2)

For the purposes of this study, spiritual formation is defined differently than moral formation. Moral formation is about striving for values and adhering to those values. Spiritual formation is about developing and maintaining a relationship with a personal, transcendent God who revealed himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the Apostle Paul and the early Church, the spiritual person included the mind, the body, and the spirit (Babcock 13). Thus, moral formation is a subset, not mutually exclusive of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is not the pursuit of a subjective spirituality as defined by Scholasticism. Kenneth Leech sees spiritual formation as a process of becoming spiritually mature through confrontation, exploration, and struggle (5). Dr. Larry Crabb sees spiritual formation as a cycle between a Job experience of suffering, an Ecclesiastes experience of futility, and a Song of Solomon experience of ecstasy. Without these three elements, a person will remain spiritually deformed.

Hendrik Kraemer argues "according to the testimony of history [the church] has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its nature and mission (24-26)." Suffering and failure can occur naturally, or they could be

proactively interjected into youth ministry programs. Ian Matthew emphasized St. John of the Cross' interpretation of suffering. St. John refers to his solitary confinement in Toledo, Spain, as "the night of the spirit" or "dark night of the soul" that leads to the deepest transformation that God works in a person. Youth ministries do not program for a dark night of the soul experience with their participants because they spend all of their energy trying to prevent it. A youth pastor would watch their program be undermined while parents rescue their precious young person from the experience. Teen Challenge, by contrast, incorporates the dark night of the soul as a necessary component to its program. This struggle is realized through the separation from parents, friends, familiar surroundings, and material possessions. The separation exposes the participant to suffering, the strict ethos exposes the participant to futility, and the spiritual experiences expose the student to a healthy ecstasy.

If the deepest transformation a person can experience is through a cycle of suffering, futility, and ecstasy, then one would expect suffering to occur more on the programming side of ministry in some didactic form. In Western culture, suffering and futility do not appeal to the masses. Parents typically want their children to remain at the same level of predictability throughout adolescence and do not have the time or tolerance to deal with each of Erikson's developmental crises. St. John of the Cross said his imprisonment and his suffering granted him a share in the dying and rising of Jesus. Although he escaped, his resurrection was not his escape; he had already come to life before his friends could set about restoring him. The poetry he composed in prison is a sign that something was released in him there that had not been available to him before (Matthew 11).

The Bible highlights a support, attachment, and even intimacy in the suffering of the soul in the story of Jesus in the wilderness: “At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him” (Mark 1:12-13). This story places value on the opportunities afforded by suffering. The angels were either attending to Jesus’ mind, body, spirit, or a combination of these. Andrew Root writes, “This question [what is happening to the suffering person] is more than existential, it is also social. It seeks to understand how large cultural/social structures are impacting the person” (44).

Kenda C. Dean and Ron Foster put things in perspective with their comment, “We have tended to their [adolescents’] situations more effectively than their souls” (9). Research shows that the process of spiritual formation needs social connections during periods of suffering in order to be thoroughly effective. Somehow the story of Jesus in the wilderness can be woven into the youth ministry paradigm.

### **The Need for a Rite of Passage**

According to Mark DeVries, youth ministries are not making a significant change in the number of Christian adults, even though the number of adolescents involved may be holding steady:

The crisis in youth ministry is, simply put, that the ways we have been doing youth ministry have not been effective in leading our young people to mature Christian adulthood. Even with the massive increase in funding and training for youth ministry, even with the exponential increase in the number of resources available to those of us doing youth ministry, we are seeing no appreciable increase in the percentage of adults in our culture who are living out their faith for themselves. (26)

Identifying whether or not a crisis exists, and from where the crisis emanates may be difficult. This author says a crisis exists in youth ministry. The crisis, according to the findings of the Commission on Children at Risk, exists but differs in focus. According to



Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, youth ministry and youth culture is improving. A crisis in youth ministry to some pastors means that something is wrong with the program. Anecdotal writing of popular authors ties the crisis in youth ministry to lower youth ministry attendance and low attendance rates of college students within the church at large.

According to Smith and Denton, the crisis in youth ministry may not be a crisis at all but a revelation that no paradigm or program can outdo the influence of the parent: “Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parent misperceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents” (260). Furthermore, parents and other adults will most likely “get what they are” (261). Generational curses and blessings are powerful. Therefore, the crisis is with people, not with the programs. In other words, I would speculate no matter how much parents change their parenting strategy or a youth group ramps up its programs, generational transference of blessings or curses is the greatest influence in a child’s life. The parent’s finest hour or darkest night with their child may come from their own moments of suffering or futility, when a curse is replaced with brokenness and release. According to Erikson, the socialization process consists of eight phases that include a crisis of suffering, belief, or futility that prepares the person for the next stage. For this author, crisis is *necessary* (“Erikson’s Theory”). Satisfactory learning and resolution of each stage is necessary if the child is to manage the next and subsequent stages effectively (see Figure 2.1).

An offshoot of the lack of spiritual vitality in U. S. adolescents is the parents’ lack of awareness for their child’s emotional and spiritual needs. According to *Hardwired to*

*Connect*, parents and pastors are doing a remarkably poor job of addressing adolescents' partly hardwired needs for risk, novelty, excitement, and peer affiliation (23):

Moreover, puberty and adolescence—a time of rapid physical, sexual and reproductive maturing, guided in part by increases in estrogenic hormones in females and in testosterone in males—is a time in which human communities across time and cultures typically mobilize themselves quite purposively to define and enforce the social meaning of sexual embodiment and thereby seek to guide burgeoning adolescent strength, energy, aggression, and sexuality in pro-social directions. These mobilizations are commonly expressed through gender-specific rituals, tests, and rites of passage. (24)

The crisis in U. S. adolescents may be traced to what popular authors say is a disconnect from parents and pastors when adolescents, especially boys, get wild. According to research, alterations in levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine in parts of the adolescent brain can produce a “reward deficiency” (Spear 12-15). For adolescents, any pleasurable stimulus may need to be especially powerful and intense; thus, many teens' quest for adventure, novelty, and risk may simply reflect their efforts to feel good (*Hardwired to Connect* 22). God's plan is for wildness to push the young person out of the cocoon of childhood and into the adult realm.

Years ago, Lawrence O. Richards compiled a literary review on the subject of Christian maturity and came to the following conclusion:

The concept of providing youth with a challenge through which they can both prove and develop their competence is appropriate to the emotional and spiritual challenges of disciplined living for Christ. What I am suggesting, then, is that we structure youth ministry to involve our youth in real life, not to protect them from it. (101)

Wildness is good, in the right context. Parents and pastors can look to at least one area of Western society where wildness is acceptable—sports.

As a youth pastor, I have speculated that athletics had great power to spark moral and spiritual formation. I have also reasoned that sports teams as a social

institution are experiencing an increasing influence on adolescents in modern Western society. Robbie Andreu writes about one of the new University of Florida football traditions created by then second-year head coach Urban Meyer. When a freshman football player arrives on campus, he is assigned a big brother, usually a senior player, and a black stripe is placed on his helmet. When he earns the right to be a Florida Gator through effort and performance on the field and in the classroom, the stripe is removed by the player's big brother in front of the rest of the team. The environment created provides that for which young men long in their hearts and in their physiological makeup. The environment fosters connectedness. One could assume that many social institutions are crumbling not because American teenagers do not desire connectedness but because families and churches are not *providing* the connectedness that God has hardwired into humans. Clark speaks to the idea that some youth ministries and churches exploit people, and that idea will not work in the new culture driven more by connections than by institutional care:

What is new to this stage [becoming an adolescent] is that because midadolescents believe they have been taken advantage of for most of their lives by those in authority (and are not yet developmentally able to distinguish the good teacher/coach/Sunday school teacher from the bad), they experience to a greater intensity the need to build deep, intimate, and powerful peer relationships to survive. Because of this intensity, the drive to build a reservoir of social capital will not be denied, regardless of the source. (60-61)

The words "social institution" are an oxymoron when put together. Institution insinuates an expert-led organization that is somewhat professionalized. Authoritative communities are less likely to use words such as *client* or *services*, and will more likely use words such as *neighbor*, *friend*, and *family* (*Hardwired to Connect* 37). Institutions need people to perform to keep the internal workings fully operational; authoritative communities just need people.

Logically, institutions reward those in the organization exhibiting outstanding performance. If not, institutions will take for granted those who perform well in the organization to keep it functioning. The irony is that adolescents may misbehave in order to meet their need for social capital within the organization. Donald M. Joy appeals for a ritual process in Christian congregations and families to satisfy the drive for social capital. After directing Discipleship Development through Trailcamping for about twenty years, Joy realized that the week of trail family bonding and of faith commitments was producing powerful early adult effects among graduates. Clark reminds us that a person can look like an adult, smell like an adult, and talk like an adult in certain situations, but can still be a twelve-year-old inside:

When culture affirms that someone has individuated in terms of identity, is willing to take responsibility for his or her life and choices, and has entered interdependently into the community of adults, that person is said to be an adult. The idea of adult is about how one sees oneself and thereby relates to others. (Clark 29)

Erikson reminds us that the process towards adulthood includes crises to be overcome. Richards reminds us that curriculum and institutional systems don't solve the crises of adolescence and impart life. Researchers say authoritative communities can prevent this problem. Bishops are calling for answers from their congregations to deal with this issue.

### **Teen Challenge**

In 1958, David Wilkerson founded the original Teen Challenge Center in Brooklyn, New York, to minister to teenage gang members with a message of conversion and new life. Teen Challenge developed out of a Protestant Pentecostal street ministry, and the program quickly opened its doors to narcotics addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, unwed mothers, and others. This program offers residential care for teens as well as adults seeking freedom from life-controlling problems.

**Teen Challenge has a rich history. In 1966, Freddie Garcia had a moment of reckoning when he experienced Teen Challenge:**

**Freddie had lived on the streets for years, stealing to support his drug habit and losing his last shred of dignity. After flunking out of every drug program he tried, he decided to try the faith-based program Teen Challenge in California—more out of desperation than hope. What he experienced there was like putting his finger into an electrical socket. The jolt of power blasted him into a whole new life. (Glenn, 9)**

**Soon after graduating, he and his wife, Ninfa, founded the church called Victory Fellowship of Texas, which has helped more than thirteen thousand people leave addiction and get their lives on track (Glenn, 10). Freddie would not be a pastor, and Victory Fellowship would not exist today if not for Teen Challenge. Victory Fellowship claims thirteen thousand people changed as a result of their efforts.**

**Continuing the historical overview, Teen Challenge's claim of a 70 percent cure rate for the drug addicts graduating from their program attracted the attention of the U. S. Federal Government in 1973. Evaluation of the Teen Challenge program conducted by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) in 1975 found that 87 percent of former abusers were abstaining from marijuana seven years after completing the program, and 95 percent of former heroin abusers were abstaining from abuse seven years later. Similarly, research by Dr. Aaron T. Bicknese in 1999 found that 86 percent of former abusers were abstaining from drugs after their Teen Challenge rehabilitation. No public funded program showed such success rates. Most research showed that fewer than 10 percent still abstained from drug abuse five years after treatment ("Comparative" 229).**

In 1984, Gruner said that the high failure rate of many public and private rehabilitation programs had been the result of failed hunches and preconceived ideas of what would work:

In a review of therapeutic communities by Reginald Smart in 1976 revealed graduation rates for addicts were no more than 15 percent. However, an independent study by Hess indicated that 46.5 percent of those entering the Teen Challenge Training Center in Rehrersburg, Pennsylvania continued to graduation. This study of a cohort of Teen Challenge graduates seven years after graduation showed that 95.3 percent had not returned to heroin, 82.8 percent had not returned to alcohol use, and 70.3 percent had not been arrested. The question follows: Why? (2)

Dr. Catherine Hess, who directed the NIDA-funded study, told a journalist almost twenty-five years later, “It was probably the most effective rehabilitation program I have seen anywhere—and it still is” (qtd. in Glenn 65).

In 1984, Teen Challenge was reported as the largest organization of its kind, with 130 centers and 2,885 beds nationwide (Gruner 3). According to Barbara J. Elliott, by 2004 Teen Challenge had 250 centers in sixty-seven nations throughout the world. The number of beds nationwide was reported at 3,400 (118). The organization is privately funded. It is a faith-based, self-accrediting ministry with ninety-eight accreditation standards its affiliates must fulfill (118).

Leaders in Teen Challenge speculate that the spiritual component of the program is the key to the high success rate of Teen Challenge graduates (Glenn 62). According to the Association of Christian Alcohol and Drug Counselors Institute, Bicknese identifies the following factors in his dissertation as the most positive, helpful, and effective dimensions of the Teen Challenge rehabilitation program, in this order of importance from fifty-nine respondents:

- Jesus Christ or God;
- Schooling, teaching, or the Bible;

- Advisor, staff, love, encouragement;
- Fellowship, unity, friends, living with others; and
- Discipline, structure, work (“Teen Challenge Research”).

These descriptors are congruent with core criteria for an authoritative community cited earlier in this research.

From my experience with Teen Challenge, I speculate that the nonprofessionalized nature of the Teen Challenge staff would be added to this list upon further research. I have observed a Teen Challenge facility and offsite events, I have heard countless stories from my father, and I have heard comments from numerous Teen Challenge participants concerning the ministry’s lack of efficiency. This lack of efficiency sounds negative in a Western context. Hardwired to Connect portrays a nonprofessionalized ethos as a strength because the main action of the community is transformation, not efficiency—arguably the hallmark theme of modern professionalism (37). Teen Challenge counselors offer to the participants a powerful and compelling story of brokenness-restoration that counters the lack of a theology or clinical degree. Most of the staff do not hold professional degrees in either counseling, administration, or theology. The nonprofessional ethos of Teen Challenge contributes to its success according to staff and students I have encountered over the years.

An independent survey of Teen Challenge of Chattanooga alumni was conducted from 1992 to 1994 by Dr. Roger Thompson, head of the criminal justice department at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Of the random sample of fifty adult graduates, 67 percent were abstaining from illegal drugs or alcohol, and 88 percent had not required additional drug treatment programs. Although 60 percent had been embroiled with the law before entering the program, only 24 percent of the graduates had issues with the

law. In addition, 72 percent were employed (half of them at the present job for more than a year), and 8 percent were students. Finally, 67 percent reported that they attended church regularly (Glenn 65).

In 1995 amid a storm of publicity, Texas governor George W. Bush publicly backed Teen Challenge when the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse threatened to revoke Teen Challenge's license to operate if it did not provide certified chemical dependency counselors and other professional staff. Governor Bush appointed a statewide task force to examine the benefits of faith-based programs. A spokeswoman told the press, "Governor Bush believes that religious faith tends to make people more responsible" (qtd. in Herrick 42). Under obvious pressure, the state agency backed down and Teen Challenge continued to operate. On another occasion, Governor Bush himself said, "Teen Challenge should view itself as a pioneer in how Texas approaches faith-based programs" (Maynard and Olasky). In 2001, Teen Challenge's documented success rates played a role in the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

### **Conclusions and Applications**

With pastors, parents, and researchers bantering about the crisis with today's U. S. adolescents—social institutions such as the family and the church—are not considered the formidable teachers of values that they once were. Research has proven that Teen Challenge is a faith-based substance abuse recovery program that has effectively received ethnic minorities, urban poor, women, young people, and children with life-altering addictions or destructive attitudes/behaviors into its midst and has turned them into visible examples and reflections of how daily life often looks coupled with spiritual life.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Design of the Study**

The limited purpose of this project was to examine the spiritual change experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. The documented success rate of the Teen Challenge ministry for drug and alcohol recovery and assumed success rate of the program for facilitating spiritual change form the backdrop for this study of adolescent participants. A goal for the study was to uncover characteristics of the Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc. ministry that facilitate spiritual change and to note to what extent these characteristics hindered or facilitated spiritual change in the adolescent participants.

The sampling population was comprised of adolescent male and female participants of the Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc. program who had graduated within the last five years. While variation exists among Teen Challenge centers, the curriculum, rules and general program structure between the sites are uniform.

In order to measure spiritual change, a quantitative spiritual change inventory provided the questions needed for data collection (see Appendix A). Adaptation of a spiritual growth inventory used by Babcock of Asbury Theological Seminary in his dissertation researching spiritual growth and formation at Northeastern Seminary (184) produced a sufficient tool.

#### **Research Questions**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Teen Challenge Program, the instruments employed provided data necessary to answer three basic questions.

### **Research Question #1**

**What is the spiritual formation profile of adolescents exiting Teen Challenge?**

The answer provided the baseline for this study. The researcher-designed qualitative analysis (see Appendix B) and the background questions from the Spiritual Change Inventory (see Appendix A) provided a baseline of the students' spiritual profile, which established the trajectory of spiritual development in the life of the participant.

### **Research Question #2**

**What spiritual changes are observed by the adolescents as they progress through the Teen Challenge program that led to the spiritual formation profile in Research Question 1?**

The Teen Challenge Program operates on the assumption that with specific programming and counselor modeling, a participant's spiritual life will experience change.

### **Research Question #3**

**What elements of the Teen Challenge program, if any, can be correlated to these spiritual changes?**

Assuming that the answer to Research Question #2 demonstrated a positive or negative change, the final aspect of this research determined what aspects of Teen Challenge contributed to these changes. Filtering out a number of intervening variables assisted the search for the correlations.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of the research conducted was Teen Challenge graduates from centers that were part of Teen Challenge Florida, Inc. The sample consisted of seventeen participants were residents between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. This sample

delimiter was chosen because a participant eighteen years of age can participate in an adolescent Teen Challenge program if he or she turns eighteen while in residence. This sample was derived from close to one hundred survey responses collected from a random mailing to recent graduates of Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc. Because all the participants were minors at the time of their entry into the Teen Challenge program, the surveys were sent out by the directors of the five Teen Challenge centers. Graduates were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. Due to the confidential nature of a juvenile drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, I could not obtain contact information on graduates. Teen Challenge directors utilized convenience sampling to obtain respondents. By definition, a graduate would be a success story from a Teen Challenge director's perspective. In order for Teen Challenge to obtain graduates with a negative viewpoint who would participate in the study, the directors would have had to proceed beyond the bounds of a convenience sample. Furthermore, the graduate had to take initiative to volunteer for the study.

Much has been written regarding the issue of determining an appropriate sample size for a research project. Irving Seidman speaks of the need for sufficiency and saturation in determining sample size. Following his approach, two questions need satisfaction: (1) "Are the numbers sufficient to reflect the range of participants that make up the population?" and (2) "have you reached the point where you are hearing the same information reported?" (47).

### **Instrumentation**

The research for this study was qualitative in nature. A researcher-developed, open-ended, semi-structured interview questionnaire was inspired by the Spiritual Growth Inventory developed by Babcock to measure spiritual growth and formation at

Northeastern Seminary (see Appendix A). Permission was sought and granted by Teen Challenge and parents/guardians to allow the participants to speak freely in their narratives. A guarantee of privacy was given in writing from the Teen Challenge organization to the participants (Patten 66).

The main method of data collection was a semi-structured, open-ended telephone interview with seventeen Teen Challenge participants and thirteen adults with the condition of anonymity and confidentiality. Robert A. Emmons observes that an open-ended interview method holds wider applicability in the assessment of spirituality and religiousness than a rigid interrogation by providing a window into the person's thinking process (97).

### **Reliability and Validity**

The traditional concepts of reliability and validity of research do not always hold within qualitative research (Wiersma and Jurs 215). Qualitative research occurs in the natural setting, rendering study replication difficult. Internal validity relies on the logical analysis of the results of the survey, on attention to the details of the interviews, and on comparing the perspectives of those who were interviewed.

Reliability and validity requirements mandate researchers to compare and contrast observations by means of triangulation (Clark 193). Triangulation can take many forms, but its basic feature will be the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units (Denzin 308).

### **Data Collection**

I began by calling Teen Challenge facilities and requesting permission to conduct the study. Upon receiving permission, I asked the leadership to contact a sampling of recent adolescent graduates I could approach for the study. Teen Challenge directors

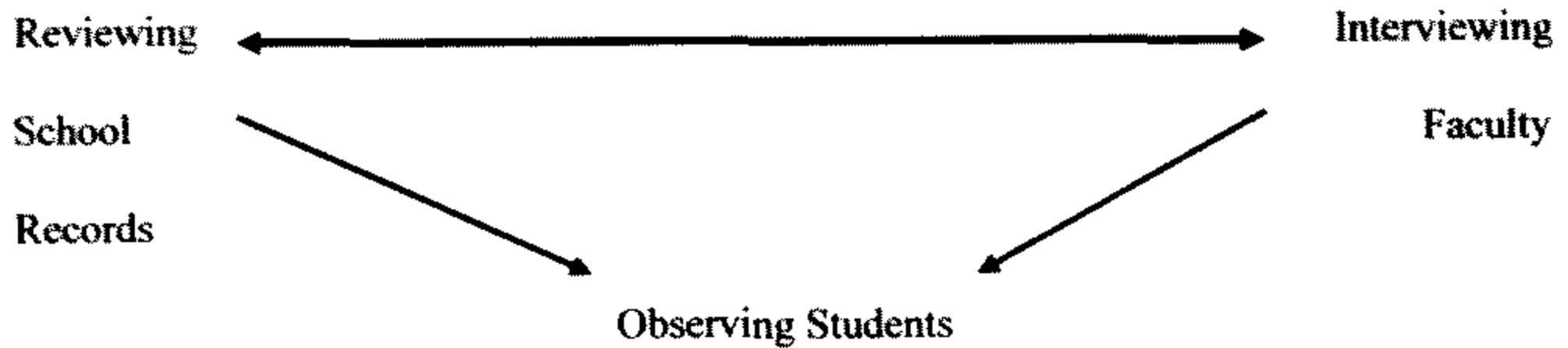
mailed one hundred consent forms using convenience sampling with a goal of securing forty participants who would, in turn, call me to schedule the interview. Seventeen respondents contacted me. I recorded the telephone interviews and transcribed the conversations for coding purposes. All data were masked through aggregation and summary to eliminate individual identification. Thirteen respondents recommended an adult to interview for triangulation purposes; therefore, a total of thirty interviews were conducted.

For this dissertation, I used triangulation involving multiple data sources and multiple data-collection procedures. For data sources, I compared the data collected through the interview process with my observations of the program, with my observations of my father, with my observations of recent Teen Challenge graduates, with letters from my father about his Teen Challenge experience, and with other sources of data. Furthermore, through the process of interviewing adults who knew the adolescents in this study before and after Teen Challenge, I filtered my observations and conclusions in order to temper my subjectivity. For data collection, I employed interviews, observation, and review of past research or letters from my father.

### Triangulation Involving Multiple Data Sources



### Triangulation Involving Multiple Data-Collection Procedures



Source: (Weirisma and Jurs pg. 257)

Figure 3.1. Examples of triangulation.

### Data Analysis

Examination and coding of qualitative data analysis of the digitally recorded telephone interviews highlighted themes necessary for analysis. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to avoid charges that my recollection and encoding filters biased the data. I video recorded three of the thirty respondents to see if the presence of a video camera would hamper the interview. My observation was that the twenty-seven audio recorded interviews over the telephone were more effective than the three video recorded interviews. The presence of the video camera distracted the respondents. The digital recording of each telephone interview was much more effective than conventional tape recording or conventional video recording. The interviews could instantaneously be transferred to a computer and reviewed rapidly and repeatedly. Digital audio recording

facilitated the development of a grounded theory because so many quotes were readily available from each respondent and incorporated into the findings.

Interviews of the participants, interviews of adults connected with these participants, researcher observation of Teen Challenge facilities and rallies, an interview with the CEO of Teen Challenge USA's Southeast Region, and letters from my father documenting his experiences at Teen Challenge in detail combined to maintain a "chain of evidence" (Yin 85). In the following chapters, I present general and specific observations on the data collected. After compiling the results, I contrasted and compared them with the information already reported on Teen Challenge presented in the review of literature.

### **Generalizability**

A common question about qualitative research is, "Are qualitative findings generalizable?" (Bogdan and Biklen 32). This question relates to external validity, and it must be considered with qualifications when applied to qualitative research. When conducting this type of research, the researcher does not need to focus on whether or not the results allow for broad generalization. The extent to which adequate theoretical constructs and research procedures are used so that others can understand the results is the key for broad generalizability (Wiersma and Jurs 216).

This study was limited to graduates of Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc. who participated in the program as adolescents. The unique characteristic of these Teen Challenge participants that cannot be generalized outside of the program is the addiction to alcohol, drugs, or other life-controlling issues. Furthermore, the addiction experience may generate effectual factors that would not generalize outside of Teen Challenge.

**Unique characteristics of a fifteen-month residential program, most notably the twenty-four hour monitoring of participants, cannot be generalized outside of the program.**

**Grounds for confidence that the design of this study is authentic, trustworthy, credible, and confirmable include the recurring themes observable within the data and the compelling stories of transformation. Findings of the study are summarized in Chapter 4 and discussion about the results is recapitulated in Chapter 5.**



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

The limited purpose of this project was to examine the spiritual change experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. The research focused on three questions: (1) What is the spiritual formation profile of adolescents exiting Teen Challenge? (2) What spiritual changes are observed by the adolescents as they progress through the Teen Challenge program that led to the spiritual formation profile in Question 1? (3) What elements of the Teen Challenge program, if any, can be correlated to these spiritual changes?

#### **Profile of Participants**

I interviewed seventeen graduates of the program for this study. I collected basic demographic data first as a part of each telephone interview. I identified the independent variables of gender, age at time of Teen Challenge involvement, time elapsed since completing the Teen Challenge program, Teen Challenge facility location, and prior church involvement. For triangulation purposes, I also interviewed thirteen adults recommended by thirteen of the seventeen participants. I asked these adults the same questions as the adolescents, altering the question to pertain to the participant rather than to "self," as they are worded in Appendix A.

#### **Gender and Age**

Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed for this qualitative study, nine were female (53 percent) and eight were male (47 percent). The median age of the participants while involved in the Teen Challenge program was 15.8 years, where the oldest was 17 and the youngest was 13. For the adolescent programs, Teen Challenge has a strict rule

about participants interacting with the opposite gender. No participant can interact privately with the opposite gender, participant or staff, while in the program and upon exiting the program for a six-month period. Enforcement of this policy occurs by Teen Challenge leveraging the participants' past loyalty and time investment in the program. The exiting participant signs an agreement not to interact with the opposite gender in private. If the student fulfills the agreement for six months, he or she can return to Teen Challenge for a graduation ceremony. This agreement is extensive. One respondent (A9), a male adult, was recommended by P9, a female, for this study. The participant (P9) was prohibited from interacting with A9 in a private setting. For the interview, A9 commented on this policy:

They still won't let me contact her. I'm a 46 year old single male. Don't even get me started on that one. I'm 46 years old and they won't even let me contact her.... I've been her mentor for a number of years and for me to not be a part of it [her recovery] isn't the Christian way.... It isn't the spiritual way.... They are taking it too far.

P9 recommended A9 for this study knowing that an adult was desired for the interview who knew P9 before and after Teen Challenge. In frustration, A9 commented that he had "no idea" how she was doing. The response by A9 underscores a theme examined later in this qualitative study when discussing possible hindrances to spiritual change.

### **Time Elapsed Since Exiting the Program**

In order to adhere to the boundaries of research question one, I chose participants that had exited Teen Challenge within the last five years of this study. Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed, the median time elapsed since completion of the program was 12.8 months, while the longest time elapsed was forty-six months, and the shortest time elapsed was two months.

## Teen Challenge Location

Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed for this qualitative study, six (35 percent) participated in Teen Challenge at the all-female Seale, Alabama, facility; four (24 percent) participated in Teen Challenge at the all-male Bonifay, Florida, facility; four (24 percent) participated in Teen Challenge at the all-male Vero Beach, Florida, facility; two (12 percent) participated in Teen Challenge at the all-female Jupiter, Florida, facility; and one (6 percent) participated in Teen Challenge at the all-female Lakeland, Florida, facility. The distribution of participants is highlighted in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1. Distribution of Participants (N=17)**

Facility	Male n	Female n
Seale, AL	n/a	6 (P7, P9, P12, P14, P15, P17)
Bonifay, FL	4 (P4, P5, P13, P16)	n/a
Vero Beach, FL	4 (P2, P3, P8, P10)	n/a
Jupiter, FL	n/a	2 (P1, P11)
Lakeland, FL	n/a	1 (P6)
Gender total	8	9

Teen Challenge facilities only contain participants of one gender. The only exception I observed from the data was a limited number of staff spouses. This contributes to the “bubble effect,” a term coined by several of the respondents in this study. The participant was referring to the social insulation Teen Challenge provides. The three contributions of a same-gender residence are (1) removing the temptation and

magnetic pull of the opposite gender, (2) fostering a compelling vision of how to live for Christ when others of the same sexual category are living an abundant life without help from the outside, and (3) strengthening morale and healthy emotional bonding. This third contribution was essential for the spiritual change of the Bonifay males in particular. According to the data, six participants turned eighteen while in the program. When a participant turns eighteen, he or she is free to leave. Every participant in this study eligible to leave Teen Challenge early mentioned a desire to leave—; none of them did so. The healthy same-gender emotional bonding was one factor keeping them in residence.

P16 reported that the Bonifay, Florida, facility is the only Teen Challenge center out of the programs surveyed by this study where participants can be placed there against their will; parents sign a waiver. Furthermore, P16 reported that the emphasis of this facility is on eradicating addictions more than it is on spiritual maturity, which may impact comparing the levels of spiritual maturity between the juvenile males at the Bonifay facility and the Vero Beach facility. However, P16 had the most spiritual maturity descriptors of all the interviews, and he attended the Bonifay facility.

### **Prior Church Attendance**

Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed for this qualitative study, six (35 percent) attended a church on a regular basis prior to Teen Challenge for their entire lives, one (6 percent) attended a church on a regular basis prior to Teen Challenge for fourteen years, two (12 percent) attended a church on a regular basis prior to Teen Challenge for eleven years, one (6 percent) attended a church on a regular basis prior to Teen Challenge for seven years, four (24 percent) attended a church on a regular basis prior to Teen Challenge for five years, one (6 percent) attended a church on a regular

basis prior to Teen Challenge for less than one year, and two (12 percent) never attended a church prior to Teen Challenge. Furthermore, eleven (65 percent) of the participants were members of a church prior to Teen Challenge, while the remaining six (35 percent) were not members of a church prior to Teen Challenge. Although 65 percent of the participants were members of a church prior to their Teen Challenge experience, only 30 percent of the participants reported church attendance having a positive impact on their lifestyle. Prior church involvement is highlighted in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2. Contingency Table on Church Membership and Church Impact Prior to Teen Challenge.**

		Did your church attendance impact your behavior in a positive manner?	
		Yes (n=5) %	No (n=12) %
Were you a member of a church prior to Teen Challenge?	Yes (n=11) %	30	35
	No (n=6) %	0	35

Review of the data on prior church involvement shows that eleven (65 percent) of the adolescent participants were members of a church prior to Teen Challenge, but twelve (71 percent) report that their church attendance did not have a positive impact on their lives. The question was asking for a positive response, so by answering “no” to this question, the respondents meant either that the church experience had no impact or had a negative impact on their behavior.

For triangulation purposes, I interviewed a parent, counselor, or other adult that knew the participant both before and after the Teen Challenge experience. I had the

opportunity to interview representatives for thirteen of the seventeen participants. The adult provided support for establishing the spiritual condition and experience of the participant before entering the Teen Challenge program. In addition to participant and adult responses, my personal observations of Teen Challenge proved helpful (see Appendix B). For further triangulation, Appendix C includes quotes from my father's letters written while in Teen Challenge.

In this chapter, the research data are organized around the three research questions; hence, the responses to the initial investigative study are as follows.

### **Spiritual Profile of Participants**

I asked participants and their adult counterparts a number of questions that sought to establish their spiritual formation profile both before and after completing the Teen Challenge program. Two significant pieces of data for establishing the spiritual profile of the participants are that first, all of them reported to be born again—or converted to Christ—by the time they exited the program and that second, all of them reported that while participating in the program they experienced positive spiritual change that produced notable changes in their behavior.

Questions about spiritual maturity produced answers indicating what spiritual maturity meant to the participants and indicating to what degree the participants considered themselves to be spiritually mature. Using telephone interviews as an interactive data collection technique (Wiersma and Jurs 204), I soon identified three general categories for spiritual maturity (see Table 4.3) along with codes for what spiritual maturity meant to the participants (see Table 4.4). The corresponding adult interviews are included in Table 4.3 through Table 4.5 and Appendix G to triangulate the

responses. The adults commented on how they would define spiritual maturity and then commented on the participants' level of spiritual maturity.

**Table 4.3. Three Categories of Responses Answering the Question: "Are You Spiritually Mature?"**

No	Striving	Yes
		P1/A1
		P2/A2
P3/A3		
	P4	A4
	P5/A5	
	P6/A6	
P7/A7		
A8		P8
		P9
A10	P10	
		P11/A11
		P12/A12
	P13/A13	
		P14
	P15	
		P16
	P17	

Of the seventeen adolescent respondents and corresponding adult respondents (n=30), six (20 percent) reported that the participant (P) was not spiritually mature after

participating in the Teen Challenge program. Ten (33 percent) reported striving toward spiritual maturity. Almost half (43 percent) reported that the participant was spiritually mature. Three of the adults did not agree with the participant's assessment of his or her own spiritual maturity, two reporting a more negative assessment and one reporting a more positive assessment. One respondent (A9) did not know the spiritual condition of his corresponding participant.

Tables 4.4–4.5 and Appendix G are related. A comparison can be made between respondents who indicated they were not spiritually mature (see Table 4.4), were striving for spiritual maturity (see Table 4.5), and were spiritually mature (see Appendix G).



**Table 4.4. Spiritual Formation Profile for Participants Who Indicated They Were NOT Spiritually Mature.**

	P3	A3	P7	A7	A8	A10	P17
Code Words—Spiritual Maturity							
Rightly handles Word of God			X				
Spiritual leader							
Humility/Brokenness				X			
No more hatred of self							
Fear of the Lord				X			
Submission to God's will/authority	X						
Discerning God's voice		X					
Obedience (pleasing God) in a context of love		X			X		
Fruit							X
Spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading					X		X
Honor father and mother							
Spiritual gifts/baptized with the Holy Spirit			X				X
No hypocrisy/integrity							
Overcoming temptation/fleeing youthful lusts							
Tithing							
Consistent church attendance/worship							X
Discerning right from wrong							
Taking responsibility for choices							
Freedom from addiction							

**Table 4.5. Spiritual Formation Profile for Participants Who Indicated They Were STRIVING for Spiritual Maturity.**

Code Words—Spiritual Maturity	P4	P5	A5	P6	A6	P10	P13	A13	P15
Rightly handles Word of God			X				X		
Spiritual leader							X		
Humility/Brokenness				X					
No more hatred of self					X				
Fear of the Lord								X	
Submission to God's will/authority						X		X	
Discerning God's voice									
Obedience (pleasing God) in a context of love				X					
Fruit						X		X	
Spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading	X	X		X	X	X			
Honor father and mother								X	
Spiritual gifts/baptized with the Holy Spirit									
No hypocrisy/integrity	X				X			X	X
Overcoming temptation/ fleeing youthful lusts								X	X
Tithing								X	
Consistent church attendance/worship		X	X						
Discerning right from wrong								X	
Taking responsibility for choices			X					X	
Freedom from addiction	X	X	X		X				

Of the seventeen adolescent respondents and thirteen corresponding adults (n=30), thirteen (43 percent) named spiritual disciplines as an attribute of spiritual maturity. This category was referenced to most by those who did not consider themselves spiritually mature, by those who were striving for spiritual maturity, and by those who considered themselves spiritually mature. The ethos at Teen Challenge fosters discipline and initiative on the part of the participant, as noted by adult respondent (A1).

Every time...[P1] sleeps over at our house, she is the only one who can get my daughter to do a Bible study. My daughter is a born-again Christian, but she is going through that phase at eighteen-years-old of being a normal eighteen-year-old. But...[P1] is not a normal eighteen-year-old. Her spiritual level is that of an older person. Normal teenagers lose interest or get distracted.... [P1] takes the initiative.

I speculate that the term “normal teenager” used by A1 is referring to contentment with a lukewarm attitude. Participants who reported that they were not spiritually mature seemed discontent in that state.

### **Spiritual Change of Participants**

The data indicated that every participant had measurable levels of positive spiritual change. Of the seventeen respondents, only four (24 percent) were born again before beginning their Teen Challenge experience, while 12 (71 percent) were not and one (6 percent) was not sure. All of the respondents said they were born again at the time of the interview. Using telephone interviews as an interactive data collection technique, I soon reached a point where I was hearing three distinct categories describing the spiritual state of the participants prior to their Teen Challenge involvement, and these categories are highlighted in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6. Categories of Attitude toward Jesus Christ (N=17)**

Favorable	Neutral	Negative
12% (n=2)	47% (n=8)	41% (n=7)

To facilitate the qualitative analysis of spiritual change within the participants, I asked the respondents and the corresponding adults what the name Jesus meant to them before Teen Challenge, what the name Jesus meant to them when they experienced spiritual change in the program, and what the name Jesus meant to them at the time of the interview. I categorized the results of this question in Table 4.6. Furthermore, I situated Tables 4.7-4.9 in such a way that the spiritual change of each participant can be tracked. For example, when P16 was asked what the name Jesus meant before Teen Challenge, the response was “a good wiccan.” When P16 was asked what the name Jesus meant at the time of his conversion, the response was “savior.” Finally, when P16 was asked what the name Jesus meant at the time of the interview, the response was “best friend” and “father figure.”

**Table 4.7. Meaning of the Name Jesus BEFORE Teen Challenge Experience**

Meaning of Jesus	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
Dictator (Hitler)		X		X							X	X					
God's Son							X										
Good Wiccan																X	
Historical/ Story Figure					X										X		
Messiah			X														
Nothing	X					X		X	X	X			X				
Ridiculous						X											
Savior																	X
Scary														X			

**Table 4.8. Meaning of the Name Jesus DURING Teen Challenge Experience**

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
<b>Meaning of Jesus</b>																	
A caring person				X						X							
A new beginning						X	X										
Beginning to trust											X						
Help														X			
Hope													X				
Interesting		X															
Love												X					
Loving God	X							X									
Rescuer									X								
Savior			X		X										X	X	X

**Table 4.9. Meaning of the Name Jesus at Time of the Interview**

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
<b>Meaning of Jesus</b>																	
Best friend						X					X						X
Everything	X	X								X		X		X			
Father figure					X	X											X
Friend							X		X						X		
Redeemer									X								
Savior			X	X				X	X		X		X		X		X

Of the seventeen participants in this study, all of them reported a life-altering addiction, behavior, or attitude that warranted the Teen Challenge program. Recurring themes emerged from the interviews that categorize these life-altering descriptors. These descriptors are catalogued in Appendix H.

The themes emerging from the data are clear. The first theme is an unhealthy relationship with the father. Only one respondent reported having a great relationship with his or her father in the context of a two-parent home with no divorce involved. Sixteen participants (94 percent) reported an unhealthy relationship with their fathers. Either the father was a drug dealer, or the father committed suicide, or the father was divorced from the mother, or the father was the adoptive father, not the biological father. According to P9, the unhealthy relationship with her parents was her undoing:

My parents divorced when I was three. Later, when I was still young, both of my parents divorced my step-parents. That had a deep effect upon me because I felt like it was my fault. I felt rejected and totally unloved because these people that were in my life were leaving me.... I had a lot of hurt built up inside. Then I found out that my mom and dad had me before they were married, and this added to my feelings that I was a mistake and shouldn't be here.... I became so angry that everyone at school was afraid of me.... I lost my virginity when I was in the ninth grade and everything went downhill from there.... I hated myself.... By the time I got to Teen Challenge I was bitter and furious at God.

According to P6, the unhealthy relationship with her father was her undoing:

When I was two, my mom committed suicide. It wasn't that big of a deal to me [I was too young to understand]...but for my dad it was because he didn't feel like he could take care of me on his own. My step-mom was very abusive physically, spiritually, and verbally...to both me and my dad. When I turned thirteen, my dad committed suicide and I became very angry at God. I felt God had the power to save my dad, and He didn't...so I turned my back on Him.

For triangulation purposes, I asked the corresponding adult (A6) to P6 why her father's suicide triggered such anger with God. A6 confirmed my impression from the interview:

P6 had become enmeshed with her father because of her stepmother's abuse. Not every respondent had a distant relationship with his or her father; in this case, the participant was too close.

Three major categories of attitudes about Jesus before Teen Challenge emerged from the data but only one category remaining after Teen Challenge. Only two of the participants (12 percent) had a positive perspective of Jesus before Teen Challenge, and all seventeen participants (100 percent) had a positive perspective of Jesus after the program.

Another major theme is emotional hurt. Responses from the interviews highlighted thirty-one descriptors for a life-altering addiction, behavior, or attitude. To have one descriptor could be radically destructive to a person, and one participant (P12) had three descriptors. Every other participant had more. The median was 5.5 descriptors. Two participants (P3 and P5) reported ten descriptors. The following quote by P1 offers perspective:

In elementary school I was a big attention seeker. I don't know why—my mom was a stay-at-home mom. She was always there for me,... but in sixth grade my problems started. I had a sexually inappropriate relationship, and after that I became really depressed.... My parents thought I should go to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist thought I should be put on an antidepressant called Zoloft, but [the psychiatrist] didn't realize that this drug could cause suicidal tendencies.... This was the beginning of my problems.... In two years I was put on twenty different medications and admitted to the psychiatric ward ten times.

According to A1, this participant (P1), who is currently 18 years old (15 when she participated in Teen Challenge) is now spiritually beyond her own 18-year-old daughter, who has participated in church for many years. For further perspective on the emotional trauma of this young person, when P1 was at her worst, she was pulling tufts of hair out of her head. The tone and language of P1 during the interview for this study gave the



impression that the person was cheerful, respectful, vibrant, confident, and spiritually astute.

Every participant affirmed that Teen Challenge fosters spiritual change, including P16:

My mind was demented.... I was always depressed.... Growing up my dad killed my grandfather for drugs, so I was born a drug baby. My mom was murdered when I was three years old because she was a witness to a drug deal.... I was going down the same path as my dad but I wasn't going to kill anyone so I didn't care.

This participant had seven descriptors of life-altering or life-destroying behaviors or attitudes. He cut the word *hate* onto his knuckles. He was the youngest participant in this study, yet he referenced the most descriptors (five) of spiritual maturity in his story:

How can you understand the Bible unless you give your life to Christ? I try and pattern my life after Paul. Paul [the apostle] is my hero because the dude's crazy. He boasts about his failures. He just wouldn't die, you know. You study his letters like Romans and stuff. It's like wow, man. So my four friends and I decided to be spiritual leaders. We got some anointing oil from [the] Sergeant, we started [leading] praise and worship, and we started prayer meetings. We would anoint [people] with oil, and people would be filled [with the Spirit].

I asked this participant (P16) what his worst experience was with Teen Challenge, and his response included descriptors of spiritual maturity:

The whole physical exercise thing was kind of gay if you ask me. Sometimes you get an attitude of I do not want to do this, but then you think about it, rebellion is as witchcraft. It is connected with evil, so that's why you have to cleanse your mind. The main problem in me was my past life.... My friend told me a verse in Luke 9:62 [quoted immediately from memory] 'for whosoever puts their hand to the plow and looks back is not fit to serve in the Kingdom of God.' I used to think if I can't get this straight I'm going to hell. I used to not care [about hell], because I didn't have any fear of God.

P16 is now a leader in the Teen Challenge program.

## **Teen Challenge Elements Fostering Spiritual Change**

Of the seventeen participants, fourteen (82 percent) reported that they had been admitted to other treatment centers. The total number of treatment centers mentioned was thirty-two. P14 reported time spent in five treatment centers, the most for any one participant. Only two participants (P16 and P17) did not report time spent in another treatment facility. The median was 1.9 treatment centers. Of the thirty-two treatment centers indicated, the number of treatment centers reported as having an impact on the spiritual condition or the behavior of the participant was zero. When the respondent was asked what type of treatment center he or she attended, the following terms were used: (1) juvenile detention center, (2) counseling center, (3) psychiatric ward, and (4) faith-based rehabilitation center. One respondent (A7) said that she sent her daughter (P7) to a Christian school to alter behavior, so in that particular instance the Christian school counted as one of the thirty-two treatment centers that was ineffective. In another case, P4 was sent to a boarding school for behavior management; this boarding school was included as one of the thirty-two ineffective treatment centers. All of the participants and all of the adults of this study reported that Teen Challenge was an effective treatment center for both behavioral and spiritual change, and all of them would recommend it to someone else.

Of the thirty respondents for this study, eleven (37 percent) reported that they found out about Teen Challenge because of their church. Seven respondents (23 percent) reported that the program was found through "word of mouth." Six respondents (20 percent) reported that Teen Challenge was found because of a desperate search for a faith-based program that would work when other programs or methods failed. Three respondents (10 percent) reported that the court ordered Teen Challenge. One respondent

(3 percent) lived near a Teen Challenge facility and wondered what it was for years. One respondent (3 percent) studied Teen Challenge as a part of her master's degree work on rehabilitation centers. One respondent (3 percent) reported that no other facility would accept her son.

The participants' stories provided recurring themes of what Teen Challenge program elements contributed to spiritual change in their lives. The thirteen adult responses were used for triangulation purposes. These themes are highlighted in Appendix I. When asked about his favorite aspect of Teen Challenge, P16 noted:

Pastor Dave, the director of the program, helped me through so much. He's not just a leader that's there looking after you...but not in contact with you. He wakes up at like 5 o'clock in the morning to pray for all of us by name. If I'm having a struggle, I could go to him. I told him he was the most influential person in my life, a father figure to me. He's like a dad, you know.

This response reinforces the data recorded earlier that a unhealthy relationship with the father was the leading cause of the emotional pain experienced by the participants. The counselor involvement in the participants' lives, either because of the proactive discernment of the counselor or the reactive respect from the participant, tied with two other themes as the second most common theme from the data: futility/hitting bottom and disciplines. My father wrote letters to our family while he was in Teen Challenge. In his letter dated June 1998 (see Appendix C) he mentioned getting a discipline:

If you have a Promise Keeper-type gathering at church, I would like to attend. The only way that would be possible would be for you to call Wayne Gray [executive director of Teen Challenge Men's Center, Sanford, Florida] and ask permission. I don't know how he would respond or how it would affect my normal pass on 6/20. Since you are my pastor, it may carry some weight. I received a discipline on pass day [last time].

The themes of futility and disciplines were each highlighted by seven participants, as previously indicated in Table 4.12 (Appendix I).

The most common theme emerging from the data, mentioned by nine participants, was the impact of the strict yet loving atmosphere on spiritual change, as noted by P2:

If you would talk to anybody living outside my home, they would say that I didn't need Teen Challenge. But going through the program and looking back on how I was...my home life was horrible. My relationship with my parents was in turmoil...I lived with my grandmother because my mother couldn't control me anymore...constant fights...constant battles...I acted like a know-it-all...I wasn't a heavy drug user, but I was doing stuff that was going to get me in trouble with the law. I'm a big guy...six foot three-two twenty [lbs.]...I'm not a small dude...nobody would stand up to me and tell me to shut my mouth...until I got to Teen Challenge. People were controlling where I slept and what I ate...it was structured to the point where it was good for me.

P2 was tender, meek, and spiritually astute during the interview. He mentioned the importance of humble obedience to God and mentioned spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer keep him close to God (see Table 4.6, Appendix G). A2, the adult sister of P2, made remarkable comments about her brother's spiritual change:

My brother had ADHD, and that made it hard for him to get close to people. He had a lot of anger management problems; he would get in a lot of fights at school.... He is actually my step-brother but we met each other when we were in kindergarten. I consider him to be my brother. Because of Teen Challenge, he is no longer quick to anger and he is no longer a know-it-all. He is friendly, outgoing, and loving. A total and radical change [has occurred]. I didn't even recognize him when I saw him. It was shocking. It was amazing. When he got out of Teen Challenge, he apologized to me and told me he loved me. Can you imagine the shock that I felt? He is still shocking me today.

This adult (A2) thought P2 would never change because he was so big, so violent, and so headstrong. This adult (A2) said, "I was scared of him. We didn't even have a relationship before. I couldn't have a relationship because I was so scared."

A subtle, underlying theme from the data was the experiential nature of charismatic worship. Teen Challenge is an Assembly of God ministry, so charismatic or

expressive worship is experienced at minimum by the influence of numerous Assembly of God churches a Teen Challenge participant will experience over a fifteen-month period. Two participants (P2 and P10) said that their trip to visit Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, to experience the Brownsville Revival was where their spiritual change began. Two participants (P7 and P11) reported that their trip to see an Acquire the Fire event (an Assembly of God event) was where their spiritual change began.

Upon conversion, social capital descriptors of work, group and individual counseling, music, sports, and recreation were mentioned as favorite elements of Teen Challenge, but other than care for animals, none of these descriptors was tied directly into spiritual change by the participants.

### **Teen Challenge Elements Hindering Spiritual Change**

Every participant and adult had positive descriptors about Teen Challenge, but not every participant and adult expressed the same level of spiritual change as P2 and A2. The stories of the participants provided one recurring theme of which Teen Challenge program elements hindered spiritual change or which elements facilitated a relapse. The responses are highlighted in Table 4.10. By relapse, every participant and adult interpreted this term as an addictive behavior relapse, not “backsliding” or a relapse in spiritual maturity. None of the male participants gave Jesus credit for rescuing him from their relapse. Instead, they underscored the futility of the destructive lifestyle as the main deterrent. Fifteen months in Teen Challenge had given them a new point of reference, as noted by P2:

I upheld the contract at least until graduation...but the contract did nothing for me. The contract is going through the motions. Staying good was totally up to me. Yes, I relapsed. I got the bright idea to go and do whatever. It was the worst decision I ever made in my entire life. I said to

myself, dude, that was a dumb idea...dude, I'm not ever doing that again...

P2 underscores a difference between behavior change and spiritual change.

**Table 4.10. Programming Elements Hindering Spiritual Change**

Program elements	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
Did (behavioral) relapse occur?	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Counselor I was close to left the program								X									
Emphasis on speaking in tongues was confusing after re-entry			X														
Left hand not knowing what right hand was doing/Re-entry rules were not clear and/or consistent											X						
Resentment that punishment (length of stay) did not fit the crime							X	X					X				
Rules were petty and unhelpful							X										X
Transition plan was not adequate			X			X				X				X			X

The data show a noticeable difference between the behavior recovery rate and the spiritual change rate, if the spiritual change rate is measured by the respondents own admission of spiritual maturity. The behavior recovery rate within this study confirmed the reported 86 percent recovery rate for the Teen Challenge program highlighted in the

literature review. Out of seventeen participants, sixteen (94 percent) reported freedom from the life-altering or life controlling behavior he or she exhibited before entering Teen Challenge. One participant (P3) reported a continued addiction to alcohol.

The rate of spiritual change is high but must be measured with care. If the participants' level of spirituality is compared to what it was prior to Teen Challenge, the recovery rate is 100 percent. All of the participants noted a favorable attitude about Jesus Christ, and all of the participants wanted to be spiritually mature and named descriptors of spiritual maturity congruent with the definition of spiritual maturity contained in this document. However, not all of the participants admitted they were spiritually mature (see Table 4.3).

Furthermore, A8 and A10 did not agree with the participants' assessment of spiritual maturity. Another difficulty is measuring the participants between the spiritually mature and the not spiritually mature. Table 4.3 has the descriptor "striving," which could possibly be misleading. Some of the participants' tone of voice sounded as if they were *wishing* to be more spiritually mature but had forsaken what they learned about maintaining spirituality in Teen Challenge. Surprisingly, some respondents did not wish to return to the level of spirituality they were experiencing in Teen Challenge. For example, P2 mentioned the lack of spiritual progress in another Teen Challenge participant with whom he interacted after the program:

That guy is a little toddler. He is still breastfeeding [spiritually]. He was one of my best friends in the program. His problem was he butt-kissed his way through the program. I'm not going to say he didn't get anything out of it. From the time he got in the program until now, the kid is totally different. He was obsessed with drinking and with drugs before the program. The spirituality came to me, but he never connected on a spiritual level with anybody. The way we changed was different.

P2 underscores a key element to the success or failure of a Teen Challenge participant in the previous quote. Somehow, the participant described by P2 did not experience the futility the program normally exerts on a person for rendering spiritual change.

Table 4.10 highlights descriptors used by the respondents when they described why spiritual maturity was not in their grasp. The emerging theme was the lack of a transition plan for exiting the Teen Challenge program. To support this theme, seven participants (41 percent) reported that a relapse into an old behavior or old attitude did occur. P6 did not experience a relapse but was reporting trouble with the transition back to civilian life. One adult respondent (A3) noted that P3 was having trouble understanding why all Christians did not speak in tongues. This trouble occurred while transitioning back to civilian life and is reported to have had a negative effect on P3. Speaking in tongues is encouraged at minimum by the influence of numerous Assembly of God churches a Teen Challenge participant will experience over a fifteen-month period.

Another important aspect of Teen Challenge's transition plan is called Master's Challenge. If a student shows acceptable leadership ability and spiritual maturity, they can be hired as interns and are placed in the Master's Challenge program. Gathering data on Master's Challenge was outside the scope of this study. For the record, three participants (P9, P13, and P16) reported that they were participants in Master's Challenge.

Another important aspect of Teen Challenge's transition plan is called "emerging leaders." I do not know if that is the official name of this program, but this phrase was used by two of the respondents (A12 and P7). One participant (P7) said she lost interest in the emerging leaders program because of the way she was treated when



she breached the agreement not to interact with the opposite gender for six months after leaving the program. Another respondent (A12) had something positive to say about the emerging leaders program for P12: “They are giving her [P12] a lot of responsibility as she works there. I trust her changes will stick because she is in emerging leaders.”

The obvious themes from Table 4.10 were that the transition plan for participants exiting Teen Challenge was not adequate and that the punishment doled out at Teen Challenge, most notably the length of the program, did not correspond with the behavior in the participants’ opinion.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Stating that spiritual change is occurring among adolescents in the Teen Challenge program at a high rate has been shown by this study. Stating the degree of spiritual change within each particular participant is outside the scope of this study. Digitally recorded interviews with participants and with adults who knew the participants, researcher observation of Teen Challenge activities, researcher observation of a family member who experienced significant spiritual change at Teen Challenge in 1997-98, letters providing documentation of Teen Challenge experiences by this family member, and the research cited in the literature review provide a chain of evidence that spiritual change is occurring at the Teen Challenge program.

### **Spiritual Profile of Participants**

Seventeen participants and thirteen adults participated in this study—thirty respondents in total. Of the seventeen participants, 65 percent (n=11) were members of a church prior to attending Teen Challenge, and 71 percent (n=12) reported that their church attendance did not impact their behavior in a positive manner. Of the thirty respondents, 43 percent (n=13) reported that the participant was spiritually mature; 33

percent (n=10) reported that the participant was striving or wishing for spiritual maturity; 20 percent (n=6) of the 30 respondents reported that the participant was not spiritually mature; and 3 percent (n=1) reported not knowing the spiritual profile of the participant.

Of the thirty respondents, 43 percent (n=13) used “spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading” as a descriptor for spiritual maturity. This was the lead descriptor for those who reported themselves as spiritually mature, those who were striving for spiritual maturity, and by those who reported themselves not to be spiritually mature. This descriptor outpaced “freedom from addiction” by all three groups.

### **Spiritual Change of Participants**

Of the seventeen participants, 12 percent (n=2) had a favorable attitude toward Jesus Christ before the program, and 100 percent (n=17) had a favorable attitude toward Jesus Christ after the program. Furthermore, 29 percent (n=5) reported that the name of Jesus meant nothing to them before Teen Challenge. “Nothing” was the most prevalent descriptor.

At the time of the interview, these same five participants (P1, P8, P9, P10, and P13) used the following descriptors for Jesus Christ: (1) everything, (2) savior, (3) friend, and (4) redeemer. These same five participants used the following descriptors to describe their addictive/destructive behavior before Teen Challenge: (1) cutting, (2) depression, (3) hatred of self/suicidal, (4) severe emotional disorder, (5) gender, (6) homosexuality within family, (7) alcohol, (8) drugs, (9) hatred of God, (10) abandonment by/abusive parents, (11) broken home/divorce, (12) school dropout, (13) ADHD, (14) arrest, (15) hatred of father, (16) hatred of mother, (17) theft, (18) arson, and (19) reactive attachment disorder. The five participants reported four or more of these descriptors. The median was 4.8 descriptors for this group. I chose this group randomly as a mini-sample to

highlight the data on spiritual change. The five participants reported no drug, alcohol, or life-controlling addiction of any kind at the time of the interview.

Of these same five participants, zero reported “no” to the spiritual maturity question. Two of these participants reported “striving” to the spiritual maturity question. Three of these participants reported “yes” to the spiritual maturity question. Two of these participants were hired interns in Master’s Challenge. These same five participants used the following words to describe spiritual maturity: (1) submission to God’s will, (2) fruit, (3) spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading, (4) effective understanding of God’s Word, (5) spiritual leader, (6) consistent church attendance/worship, (7) responsible choices, and (8) obedience (pleasing God) in a context of love. These same five participants represent four out of the five Teen Challenge centers included in this study: (1) Bonifay, Florida, (2) Jupiter, Florida, (3) Seale, Alabama, and (4) Vero Beach, Florida. The participants are three males and two females. I chose this mini-sample for this conclusion based on the descriptor “nothing” for their attitude and knowledge about the name of Jesus. This mini-sample provides an excellent summary of the compelling data from this study: these adolescents all experienced positive, measurable, qualitatively significant spiritual change as a result of the Teen Challenge program.

### **Teen Challenge Elements Fostering Spiritual Change**

Of the seventeen participants, 53 percent (n=9) used the descriptor “strict-loving atmosphere” to describe what element of Teen Challenge caused spiritual change. The participant was telling a story, so more than one descriptor could have been present in the narrative. Furthermore, 41 percent (n=7) used the descriptor “counselor” to describe what element of Teen Challenge caused spiritual change. This descriptor either meant proactive discernment of the counselor in the participant’s life or reactive love and

respect the participant gave to the counselor. To continue, 41 percent (n=7) used a variety of anecdotal references that related to the descriptor “futility” to describe what element of Teen Challenge caused spiritual change. Another descriptor for futility was “rock bottom.” The participant said phrases such as “I was tired of the way I was living.”

Of the seventeen participants, 35 percent (n=6) used a variety of anecdotal references that related to the descriptor “compelling vision provided by other students” in the program. Another descriptor not used, but relevant, is “peer pressure.” An important distinction to note is that the peer pressure was from the cultural ethos and pathos generated by the other participants’ lives. The students were not referring to the descriptor “accountability.” The concept of a compelling vision is crucial for discussion in Chapter 5 of what is needed for the student ministry paradigm in the local church.

### **Teen Challenge Elements Hindering Spiritual Change**

Of the seventeen participants, 47 percent (n=8) reported experiencing a relapse. This relapse was strictly behavioral in nature. However, the relapse did not take effect. All (except one) of the participants was free of any addictions or destructive behaviors/attitudes at the time of the interview. Therefore, this study noted a behavioral recovery rate of 94 percent (n=16).

Of the seventeen participants, 53 percent (n=9) lodged a complaint about a certain element of the program they say affected their level of spiritual maturity upon reentry into civilian life. The most popular descriptor, used by five of these participants, was “inadequate transition plan.” The anecdotal reference to the “bubble bursting” comes to mind. Factors affecting reentry included (1) mixed or negative familial response, (2) a return to previous acquaintances, (3) the sudden loss of structure and routine, (4) the

signed six-month agreement needed for graduation, (5) loss of counselor relationship, (6) a return to the program as an intern, and (7) dealing with a relapse.

The Teen Challenge elements fostering spiritual change provide the baseline for the discussion in Chapter 5 of what elements of Teen Challenge could be applied to youth group and parenting methods to increase pastors' and parents' ability to foster spiritual change. The Teen Challenge elements hindering spiritual change provide the baseline for the discussion in Chapter 5 of a hypothesis focused on how the Teen Challenge organization could improve their transition plan for graduates completing the program. The spiritual change of participants and the qualitative data it represents add to the stream of knowledge on Teen Challenge provided in the literature review. The data stimulated a grounded theory on how spiritual change is occurring at Teen Challenge.

I had some preconceptions of what I would find as a result of this research. I did hope that the effectiveness of Teen Challenge would be proven true and that transferable ideas or elements to other ministry contexts would arise from the data. However, it was a mystery to me how the ideas or elements of Teen Challenge worked to foster spiritual change on such a consistent basis. I listened to each interview twice for a total of sixty hours of research. I reported my results to a research reflection team, both as a group and as individuals, totaling another eight hours of research. A grounded theory emerged. The data showed a balanced mixture of three ingredients contributing to the noteworthy ethos and culture of Teen Challenge. I coined the phrase "the three-legged stool" to identify the grounded theory. The three-legged stool is explained in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The limited purpose of this project was to examine the spiritual change experienced by adolescents as a result of their participation in the spiritually oriented drug rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. The research focused on three questions: (1) What is the spiritual formation profile of adolescents exiting Teen Challenge?, (2) What spiritual changes are observed by the adolescents as they progress through the Teen Challenge program that led to the spiritual formation profile in Question 1? (3) What elements of the Teen Challenge program, if any, can be correlated to these spiritual changes? This study has shown that spiritual change is occurring among adolescents in the Teen Challenge program.

#### **Major Findings**

The research questions led to major findings. These findings are organized using the following descriptive headings: (1) spiritual profile of the participants, (2) spiritual change of the participants, (3) Teen Challenge elements fostering spiritual change, and (4) Teen Challenge elements hindering spiritual change. These major findings confirm the following:

- Teen Challenge's assertion that an emphasis on spiritual change is the key ingredient for higher recovery rates.
- Teen Challenge's faith-based drug and alcohol treatment is statistically better than secular treatment. The seventeen participants in this study also participated in thirty-two other treatment centers, both faith based and secular. The impact of these treatment centers was reported to be zero.

- **Teen Challenge participants reported negative issues with family of origin leading up to Teen Challenge and mixed experiences upon graduation from the program.**
- **Parents of Teen Challenge participants reported positive experiences with Teen Challenge's efforts to provide inspiration and direction; these same respondents reported negative experiences with Teen Challenge's transition plan.**
- **Finally, the findings confirm Teen Challenge contains the ingredients of an authoritative community.**

### **Evaluate and Interpret**

The major findings for this study were evaluated through three lenses: (1) the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, (2) the biblical/theological foundation established in Chapter 1 and 2, and (3) personal insights from the researcher.

### **Spiritual Profile of Participants**

Of the seventeen participants, 71 percent (n=12) reported that their church attendance did not impact their behavior in a positive manner. Some participants indicated other interests kept them from church. As seen in Chapter 2, Smith states that religious interest is under attack because the lives of young people are filled with competing influences. Other participants reported the reason that their church attendance did not impact their behavior in a positive manner was the negative influence of other adolescents in the church. The *Hardwired to Connect* study referred to earlier in Chapter 2 attests to the normalcy of adolescent attachment:

The moralization of attachment that begins with the infant-parent bond later extends outward, to the larger community, as growing cognitive capacity and widening networks of relationships lead young people to identify new and additional sources of moral meaning. For the developing child and adolescent, then, forming a moral identity is an on-going and

**increasingly complex process.... This process can happen in a good or bad way, but either way, it happens. (26-27)**

**Furthermore, the Bible displays a moralization of attachment as an important method of transferring the word of God and its blessings when it admonishes everyone to fix, tie, and teach the word of God as they lie, sit, and walk.**

**In other words, children can receive a compelling vision of how to live from the person to whom they are attached in the home. In the adolescent years, when the teenager is not at home lying, sitting, and walking a compelling vision of how to live must arise from the community to which they are attached.**

### **Spiritual Change of Participants**

**Of the seventeen participants, 29 percent (n=5) reported that the name of Jesus meant nothing to them before Teen Challenge. "Nothing" was the most prevalent descriptor, so it became the baseline for a mini-sample which represented both males and females, and represented four of the five Teen Challenge centers. This group now includes two Teen Challenge interns and three who claimed to be spiritually mature. The other two participants said they were striving for spiritual maturity. Nineteen out of the thirty-one descriptors for addictive/destructive behavior prior to Teen Challenge were given by this mini-sample, including severe emotional disorder and hatred of God.**

**After graduation, these five participants used powerful, biblical descriptors to describe Jesus Christ. All of these participants said they were free of all life-controlling or life-altering addictions/behaviors. The data shows undeniable addiction, darkness, evil, dysfunction, hatred, and gloom surrounding these participants before they entered Teen Challenge. As seen in Chapter 2, Cloud and Townsend make the case that adolescents will delay gratification, respond to discipline, deal with failure, and make good moral**



decisions when they feel attached to God and others. Participant (P13) describes the feeling of not being attached to God or others:

Back when I was a kid, I didn't get very much attention from my parents or anything, and I figured, "No one cares about me anyway so I might as well do whatever I want." I ended up hating myself.

Later in the interview, P13 displays a reversal of attitude:

[One of the counselors] taught me a lot. She had a testimony [about God's deliverance] that was a lot like mine. She could always tell when I was upset. I didn't have to say anything to her. She just knew. We had such a good connection.... She is the most "on-fire" woman of God I know. I look up to her like a mom almost. I still keep in touch with her after the program.

This participant (P13) cried tears of joy during the interview, prompted by the question about what Jesus meant to her at the time of the interview (see Appendix A). She could not hold the tears back. She said, "He saved my life. He's everything, and he doesn't condemn me. He's always there." This confirms the assertion by Cloud and Townsend that attachment is powerful.

### **Three-Legged Stool**

Pastors, parents, and researchers are deeply concerned about the spiritual disconnectedness, mental problems, and emotional stress among U. S. adolescents. Teen Challenge cannot guarantee a participant in their program will turn out emotionally healthy and spiritually mature. However, Teen Challenge spiritual change rates and recovery rates are exceptionally high, and while much of Teen Challenge is not generalizable to a church or a home, certain elements fostering spiritual change in the program can be applied in a church or a home to some degree. I categorize the elements as a "three-legged stool."

I categorize the elements in this manner for two reasons. First, if one element is deficient, the other two are rendered ineffective. The elements must be treated as equal. A parent or a pastor will want each element operating at the highest level possible, but as long as all three are given equal attention, the elements are effective. A bar stool becomes a step stool if the legs are short, but a step stool is functional. Second, the term *leg* implies foundation. These elements must be in place in order for curriculum, youth ministry programming, church attendance, family outings, family devotionals, and other spiritual opportunities in an adolescent's life to have full effect.

The first leg is a strict ethos. The word strict must be defined carefully. A strict Christian home can push an adolescent toward addictions in a hurry. By strict I mean unwavering boundaries. By strict I mean laser-like focus by the parent or pastor on the rules of engagement within the family or community. This particular ethos must produce futility without despair. This study showed that futility was a powerful motivator at Teen Challenge, underscoring the literature review of Crabb, who states that futility is a method of spirituality, and Erikson, who wrote that crisis was necessary. The second leg is the proactive discernment and love of an adult to whom the adolescent can attach. The word "attach" must be defined carefully. By attach I do not mean co-dependency. By attach I do not mean peer-to-peer friendship. I define attach within the context of Dr. Ferguson, Dr. Cloud, and Dr. Townsend mentioned earlier. The adult must meet as many relational needs as possible in the young person regardless of the adolescent's behavior. The parent must move toward the young person, and not away, when he or she misbehaves. The third leg is the compelling vision of how to live a godly life. Whether or not the parent provides the enticing picture, the young person must see a godly life in at least one significant peer.

The three-legged stool categorizes the major elements within Teen Challenge fostering spiritual change in adolescents. For the first leg, 53 percent (n=9) of the seventeen participants used the descriptor “strict atmosphere” to describe what element of Teen Challenge caused spiritual change. As for the second leg, 41 percent (n=7) used the descriptor “counselor” to describe what element of Teen Challenge caused spiritual change. Although not many of the participants gave the Personal Studies for New Christians (PSNC) curriculum credit for changing their lives, almost all of the participants mentioned the PSNC curriculum as the vehicle for accumulating biblical knowledge. While curriculum played a key role, it was the three legged stool foundation that made the curriculum effective. Participants in this study spoke of the PSNC curriculum in a positive manner. The participant had to show proficiency with the curriculum in order to receive more Teen Challenge program benefits.

Without all three of these legs, I speculate the Teen Challenge program would fall apart. The strict ethos forces the participant to seek attachment to a counselor and seek support and comfort from peers for survival. Without the counselor, Teen Challenge would be nothing more than the Marine Corps with an imaginary mission. Without the compelling vision provided by peers, Teen Challenge would probably become a psychological ward. Without the strict ethos, Teen Challenge would simply be another ministry like a YMCA. Years ago when my father first inquired about Teen Challenge, I described it as a blend between seminary, boot camp, and jail. I was wrong. Teen Challenge is a blend between seminary, boot camp, and family, another way to understand the three-legged stool. This metaphor encapsulates the ingredients of an authoritative community.

As seen in Chapter 2, an authoritative community includes the three legs: “(1) family—it is warm and nurturing, (2) boot camp—it establishes clear limits and expectations, and (3) seminary—it reflects and transmits a shared understanding of how to define a good person” (*Hardwired to Connect* 34). As seen in Chapter 2, spiritual vitality requires the three legs: (1) the Job experience of suffering, (2) the ecclesiastical experience of futility, and (3) the Song of Solomon experience of ecstasy.

Teen Challenge has maintained a fourth core value of an authoritative community, albeit in the face of strong criticism: “The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists” (*Hardwired to Connect* 34). The adolescent participants in this study did not have the wherewithal to understand that the nonclinical methodology of Teen Challenge sets it apart from the other treatment centers as an authoritative community and played a major role in their transformation:

The basic ethos and mode of operation of an authoritative community differ from those of fully professionalized and expert-led organizations. Authoritative communities are more likely to be largely defined and guided by family members, volunteers, and citizen-leaders. (37)

Theologically speaking, Christ himself expressed dismay when he realized the immensity of tasks to be completed as compared to the number of actual persons participating in those tasks. His response was not to increase the bureaucracy around him but to distribute the work beyond the professional apostles. At one point in his earthly ministry, he trained and commissioned seventy-two persons to multiply work. Before sending them out, two by two, he told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). These seventy-two workers were unpaid, nonclerical, and nonclergy personnel.

## **Teen Challenge Elements Hindering Spiritual Change**

Of the seventeen participants, 53 percent (n=9) lodged a complaint that Teen Challenge did not prepare them well for re-entry into the world. The most popular descriptor was “no plan.” All underscored the problem::

I believe the 90 percent success rate of Teen Challenge, but I believe with all my heart that Teen Challenge only plants a seed. The change depends more on what happens when they get out of Teen Challenge. In my situation, I lost a lot of money on my house, but I moved to a new place anyway so that the change in my daughter would not be lost. I saw another young man exit Teen Challenge and relapse. His family couldn't move, and that's why he relapsed. Now, he is at a ministry in another country. Without that ministry, the change in him would have been lost. Now, he's training to become a pastor. The mixed signals of Teen Challenge's transition plan did not hurt my daughter, but it did not help her either. I have seen many kids come out [of Teen Challenge] and backslide.

The issue, according to some of the respondents in this research, is the “bubble effect” or the “bubble burst,” or a problem occurred when they “left the bubble.” Teen Challenge effectively separates the adolescent from the world during their phase I, the participants experience futility and love in phase II, but when the moment arrives for the adolescent to be reinserted into the world, the rites of reincorporation are lacking. Joy emphasizes this as the highest peak, or the most important step in the rite of passage process:

I hope that somewhere it happened in ritual space: “Bring forth the best robe and put in on her, and place the family crest ring on her finger!” This highest, most rewarding ritual comes *immediately* [emphasis mine] after the waiting-paralyzed-through-the-dues paying liminal phase. (25)

Teen Challenge has a six-month trial period upon departure from the program, enacted by a signed agreement, to which the participant is to submit. The students and their parents are reporting that they either do not understand the stipulations or they do not agree with the stipulations. This process diminished the spiritual vitality of some of the participants in this study, and it did not inspire any of the participants to remain faithful. The

participants report that futility is what kept them from going back to their previous attitudes and lifestyles permanently. To summarize, the fifteen-month Teen Challenge bubble helps starve the addictive and destructive behavior out of the participant, but the same bubble hinders spiritual vibrancy upon reentry. The praise and worship, the structure, and the positive peer pressure that were all fostering spiritual change are abruptly removed.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Seventeen participants and thirteen adults were interviewed. One limit of the study pertains to the translation of anecdotal stories into code words. The adolescents, due to maturity and vocabulary limitations, gave answers forcing an extrapolation of the descriptor. I attempted to summarize comprehensively and succinctly and report the findings. Nevertheless, due to subjective extrapolations, my interpretation of the stories was a potential limitation.

A second limitation pertained to methodology. Telephone interviews were an advantage to the respondent, in my opinion. I interviewed three respondents using video and audio recording, and the respondents were nervous. The disadvantage of telephone interviews is the amount of nonverbal communication that can be lost in the exchange.

Another problem with the methodology was following the interview questions in a strict manner. With certain respondents, a strict reading of the questions did not produce a flowing conversation filled with anecdotes and descriptors for the study. I had to prompt the respondents at times, and I noticed that my tone and word use could manipulate the respondents to tell me what I wanted to hear. The key to overcoming this limitation is for the researcher to notice this phenomenon and back away from the respondent and retry for fear of skewing the data. The researcher must want the data more

than the researcher wants proof for a hypothesis.

A fourth limitation pertained to the population and sample. The adolescent respondents for this study were gathered using convenience sampling and were from one area of the country (Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc.). The executive directors of each Teen Challenge center are busy conducting their ministries and graciously made contact with recent graduates with whom they had a connection. Convenience sampling has the potential to skew the results because these participants may have a more favorable attitude toward Teen Challenge than graduates who have kept no contact with Teen Challenge. Contextual issues related to being located in the deep South could impact the participants, the counselors, or the ethos that surrounds each of the Teen Challenge of Florida, Inc. centers that might not be transferrable to other sites.

The surveys were sent out by the directors of the five Teen Challenge centers. Graduates were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. The graduate had to take the initiative, triggering a limitation. One could speculate that a graduate with a negative view of Teen Challenge would not volunteer for a study of this nature comparatively to a graduate with a positive perspective.

Due to the confidential nature of a juvenile drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, I could not obtain contact information on graduates. Teen Challenge directors utilized convenience sampling to obtain respondents. By definition, a graduate would be a success story from a Teen Challenge director's perspective. In order for Teen Challenge to obtain graduates with a negative viewpoint, the directors would have had to proceed beyond the bounds of a convenience sample. Convenience sampling was a limitation of this study, as stated earlier.

Another limitation is that the level of spiritual maturity during the participants'

Teen Challenge experiences might have been somewhat inflated by the very nature of a long-term residential program. When the residency is over, the students experience a letdown. They no longer have positive peer pressure working for them; furthermore, they no longer have the benefits of twenty-four-hour surveillance from a loving counselor.

### **Unexpected Observations**

A new insight I gained from this study was that although I believe that the Teen Challenge behavior recovery rate is high because of the faith-based nature of the ministry, much of the behavior change comes from the futility the participants experience in the program. If the participant was spiritually vibrant, he or she gave Jesus the credit for rescuing him or her from destructive lifestyles. If the participant was spiritually lukewarm, his or her reason for not continuing in their lifestyle—even after a relapse—was “that behavior is stupid” or “it just didn’t appeal to me anymore.”

Five respondents reported that their spiritual change began at the four-month mark. The clarity of recalling this particular time frame was noteworthy. They did not say “early in the program.” They did not say “after a few months.” They said, “I was born again four months into the program.” This description correlates with Phase I of Teen Challenge. The participants arrive at a place of brokenness about their behavior, their hearts and minds open, and whatever happens to be going on at the four-month mark jumpstarted the conversion experience. Of the seventeen participants, seven (41 percent) reported that their conversion experience occurred away from Teen Challenge property. The futility of the strict ethos and the disciplines for repeated behavior brought the adolescents to a place of preparation to hear and respond to the gospel. Futility does not sound very spiritual, but according to Leech it is essential:

Unless there is a real crisis within the person, religion remains a defense against life. It cripples and crushes the person. It does not, and cannot,



liberate. Before there can be this change [liberation], there must be an experience of darkness, in which the defenses of the mind are broken down. This darkness is a terrible experience of alienation, but it is the breakthrough to an experience of warmth and closeness. (107)

Leech encapsulates academically what the respondents described anecdotally. He underscores the one crisis of adolescence that is both necessary and good. This quote reinforces the notion that adolescents can thrive in a strict ethos, an idea that sounds preposterous.

Another unexpected insight I gained from this study was the importance of transitions. I was amazed that parents would spend thousands of dollars for their son or daughter to get help and not be just as desperate to change whatever was necessary when the child exited the program for that young person to thrive. Significant spiritual change had occurred in every participant. The transition out of Teen Challenge is messy for the participant; in some cases I observed a significant degradation of spiritual "quality."

### **Recommendations**

Because a significant percentage of U. S. adolescents are experiencing crises in their lives, further studies are needed to identify the specific components of Teen Challenge and other similar adolescent institutions (residential programs, schools, etc.) that are achieving empirically noticeable change in young people. Teen Challenge should be included in the stream of research on authoritative community.

The results of this study are sufficiently compelling to warrant further investigation with similar groups, including some longitudinal studies that track groups of students from the beginning to the end of their program in an attempt to identify the primary sources or determinants of the spiritual change rate. Also, research should be conducted to determine if peer influences or pastoral counseling positively impacts participants' emotional intelligence and/or spiritual development.

The research results provide heuristic insight to public officials concerned with the positive outcomes generated by faith-based initiatives. Research can continue to alert public officials to the usefulness of the Teen Challenge program for adolescents. Dr. Bolko Zimmer's dissertation provided a detailed description of Teen Challenge's effectiveness in reducing recidivism:

Texas is involved with legislation to develop partnerships between government and private religious organizations to meet the needs of the community through cooperative efforts and innovative programs. (9)

Other constructs in the Teen Challenge program should be studied, including the rigid schedule, boundaries, discipline, the homeschool educational approach, the loving and caring environment, setting of the facility, staff selection, and parent counseling. These factors all warrant further investigation to gain knowledge of exactly what impacts spiritual development in adolescents. Studies using a wider range of participants in ethnic diversity would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of spiritual development in adolescents.

I believe Teen Challenge should offer two or three transition plans for the participant based on the condition of the living situation to which he or she is returning. Teen Challenge should consider having the parents or guardians sign an agreement that they will *celebrate* the changes that have taken place and will *change* anything about the living conditions that will hamper the adolescent's spiritual transformation.

### **Application of Study to Churches**

The intent of this study was for another researcher to organize a specific youth ministry intervention for a future research project. The findings of this study will hopefully generate the next dissertation: the application of Teen Challenge elements in a youth ministry. Usually, churches cannot offer the benefits of a long-term residential

program because most people attend church once or twice a week for a few hours at best. The more distant the people are from the church leadership, the less leverage the leadership possesses. Teen Challenge can provide as strict an atmosphere as it pleases because the participants are there for fifteen months with few alternatives. Churches are faced with more competition than ever from other churches, society, the Internet, and a culture offering a plethora of enticing choices for a person's time. Therefore, churches experience enormous pressure to be as loving as possible to people without fostering a strict ethos.

At times, youth pastors expend large quantities of time and energy enticing students to attend events to ensure the program sponsored by the church is well attended. Some of these large church events have the potential of oversimplifying and trivializing the adolescent social economy of tribes or clusters (Clark 75). When I was a youth pastor I spent a great deal of time trying to eliminate cliques and integrate the students. This too oversimplifies and trivializes the needs adolescents are desperately trying to meet in this social economy. According to Clark's research, tribes and clusters come because high school students report that between divorces and tempers, family life is the unstable part of life (77).

Youth pastors can learn from Teen Challenge that larger quantities of time and energy spent on helping the parents of their students will prove beneficial. Many of the parents interviewed for this study commented on the inspiration and direction they received from Teen Challenge while visiting the facility to see their son or daughter. Another application is for the student ministry to develop a rite of passage for its participants.

## **Rites of Passage**

Churches can offer their people opportunities to place themselves voluntarily under a strict ethos for a period of time with some sort of spiritual director, guide, or authority. As seen in Chapter 2, this process is a rite of passage. Churches can look to high school and college sports teams for insight on how to develop compelling and effective rites of passage for adolescents.

After these interviews I am convinced that the hope for church youth groups to make disciples lies in fostering an environment where an unbelieving teenager can see a compelling vision of spiritual maturity by being surrounded by teenagers who are spiritually mature. Of the seventeen respondents, a higher percentage of them said that church had more of a negative impact than a positive impact. More of the respondents were offered drugs or sex from their church youth group members than they were offered a compelling vision of spiritual maturity from the youth group members. Six respondents (35 percent) said that the most important element of Teen Challenge contributing to their spiritual change was the compelling vision of how to live the abundant life shown by the other adolescents in the program. This percentage is almost as high as the percentage of how many said the counselors made the greatest difference.

## **Application of Study to Parents**

Churches may not be able to offer the benefits of a long-term residential program, but parents obviously do. This study has shown that parents play a key role in how or why an adolescent participates in Teen Challenge. A fractured relationship with the father was the norm for the participants in this study. One respondent was puzzled that she had an ideal home life and still needed Teen Challenge. On this point I can only offer a hypothesis. In comparison to the church that cannot offer a strict environment,

Christian parents can and do in many cases. The model two-parent Christian home can easily provide the strict environment of Teen Challenge, but the love and respect that participants have for the counselors is not easy for a mom or dad to develop and maintain over years of living with a teenager.

The Teen Challenge counselors have two major advantages over Christian parents for developing the love and respect of teenagers that allows a strict ethos to be effective. First, Teen Challenge counselors have been through the program, so they are saturated in the Teen Challenge culture and core values. If the counselors do not exhibit the Teen Challenge core values and live them with integrity they can be removed. By contrast, one participant (P15) said that her father was a prominent Christian in the community, but she saw hypocrisy in his private world which damaged her faith. This young person cannot just simply replace her hypocritical father figure with a new one. Second, the Teen Challenge counselor naturally possesses the brokenness-restoration results that the Teen Challenge environment fosters. The brokenness-restoration paradigm makes the counselor approachable in a strict environment. Furthermore, it garners love and respect from the adolescent. The brokenness of the counselor motivates the adult to meet the teenager's felt need for empathy. When this need is met, the teenager responds in love. The restoration of the counselor gives the counselor confidence to enforce a difficult consequence. He or she knows firsthand what the strict ethos will produce and, therefore, does not react with the same shock or condescension to sinful behavior as that of a strict Christian parent. Without providing social capital, a strict parent will be left with a rebellious teenager.

## **Suggestions for Teen Challenge**

I speculate that most residential rehabilitation centers would focus a majority of their time, money, and energy into maintaining and improving the care they offer to residents during their length of stay, thereby neglecting the transition plan back into society. Based on the anecdotal comments from respondents in this study, I offer Teen Challenge the following suggestions:

- Study the transition plan again. A high drug and alcohol recovery rate does not correlate to a high spiritual maturity rate. I was surprised by the number of participants in this study who were lukewarm about their faith and by the number of parents of participants who reported a positive recommendation of Teen Challenge, but were mixed about the transition plan. If Teen Challenge believes strongly in its transition plan, directors and counselors should present the rationale behind the plan with more clarity.
- Offer parents more options for changing the home environment before the graduate reenters society. If Teen Challenge has strong expectations for these changes, the parents in this study were not aware of them. The only requirement mentioned in this study was the student agreement not to reconnect with past destructive or dating relationships. Nothing was mentioned about a parental agreement to change the home ethos.
- Involve the local church in the transition plan. I speculate Teen Challenge expects students to acquire social capital on their own, such as finding a biblically sound church. This expectation would seem natural, because the program spent fifteen months teaching and training the students about the importance of spiritual growth and about elements like church attendance that promote spiritual growth. However, I was surprised

by the number of participants in this study who were not attending church on a consistent basis, so I would argue that the expectation that students can obtain social capital and healthy attachments on their own is unrealistic. Teen Challenge could address this significant gap in the transition process by orienting youth pastors around the country to the ministry, and by training them to minister to the graduates. No graduate should leave Teen Challenge without a personal connection to a trained youth pastor.

### **Postscript**

My father, Dennis Pikalow, experienced a radical spiritual change as a result of Teen Challenge. A dark night of the soul broke down the defenses of his mind. He said, "Brian, when I hang up, I am going to kill myself." That was the most important sentence he ever said in his life. The second most important sentence was "I'll go to Teen Challenge." After experiencing the futility of the program, change occurred. For example, Appendix C provides a brief description of his gratitude for cough drops. A person with a six-figure income and a license plate on his Corvette that read "ZMYTOY" usually doesn't show gratitude for cough drops. The letter in Appendix C was written in 1998.

At the time of this writing, my father will have been out of the program ten years. He is productive at his job, he is married to the same woman who filed for divorce, and he is able to enjoy and influence his grandchildren. One day soon, the grandchildren will become adolescents. When that day arrives, the legacy of Dennis Pikalow will be most influential. When asked about that day, ten-year-old David Pikalow said, "When I become a teenager, I don't want to be a religious man, I want to be a man with a relationship to God."

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Questions for Telephone Interview**

I interviewed seventeen participants for this study. I collected basic demographic data first as a part of each telephone interview. I identified the independent variables of gender, age at time of Teen Challenge involvement, time elapsed since completing the Teen Challenge program, Teen Challenge facility location, and prior church involvement. For triangulation purposes, thirteen participants recommended an adult who participated in a separate but similar interview with the same questions, just altered to pertain to the adolescent.

1. Did you (the adolescent) attend a church on a regular basis prior to entering Teen Challenge? If so, how many years? If so, what denomination? If so, were you (the adolescent) a member?
2. If you were a member, did you have to attend a membership or confirmation class?
3. Did your religious experience before Teen Challenge impact your lifestyle in a positive manner, negative manner, or not at all?
4. Describe what your life was like before you entered Teen Challenge. Your story will be anonymous and confidential, so please be honest.
5. At what age did your negative behavior begin?
6. Were you addicted to anything?
7. Did you consider your behavior morally wrong?
8. What would you say was the “root” of your addiction/pain/emotional instability?



9. Were you sent to other treatment centers before Teen Challenge? If so, how many? If so, what type?
10. If you spent time at another treatment center, did it impact your lifestyle in a positive manner, a negative manner, or not at all?
11. How was Teen Challenge discovered or recommended?
12. Why did someone think you needed Teen Challenge?
13. What was your attitude upon entering Teen Challenge?
14. Did spiritual change occur in your life while attending Teen Challenge?
15. Are you born again? If so, were you born again before your Teen Challenge experience or during your Teen Challenge experience?
16. When did the spiritual change begin?
17. What was the pace of the spiritual change?
18. What caused you to change spiritually?
19. What did the name Jesus mean to you before Teen Challenge? During Teen Challenge? Now?
20. Describe your favorite Teen Challenge experience. Did this experience help you change spiritually?
21. Describe your worst Teen Challenge experience. Did this experience help you change spiritually?
22. Define the term spiritual maturity. What does it mean to be “spiritually mature?”
23. Would you consider yourself spiritually mature? Why or why not?
24. Did you relapse after your Teen Challenge experience? Why?
25. How did your family respond to you after your Teen Challenge experience?

26. Did your family's response impact your lifestyle in a positive manner, a negative manner, or not at all?

27. The official questions are over. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Teen Challenge program?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Field Notes from Teen Challenge Visits**

I preached at the Sanford, Florida, Teen Challenge facility in 1998. I was before a group of men who were responsive to the preaching and supportive of the speaker. These men were demonstrative in worship, overflowing with expressions of gratitude and joy. I remember thinking, "I wish my congregation was this expressive, responsive, and grateful." My Teen Challenge experience was not with a group of homeless people at a shelter. Some of these men were hardened criminals, ordered to Teen Challenge by the courts. Others were dangerous drug dealers, and still others were successful businessmen such as my father. The eclectic nature of this group added to my wonder. This event was where my dissertation was born. I wanted to know what elements of Teen Challenge produced what I saw, and I wondered if these elements could be transferred to a church setting.

I attended my father's graduation ceremony in 1998. I heard testimonies of powerful transformation, including my dad's. Having attended hundreds of crusades, rallies, and revivals in my Christian experience, this event was one of the most moving I had ever seen. I was convinced that Teen Challenge was effective at fostering spiritual change in people, no matter what their background or previous experience.

I visited my father numerous times at the Teen Challenge facility in Sanford, Florida, throughout his stay between December 1997 and November 1998. I noticed that the "left hand did not always know what the right hand was doing." I do not mean this in a derogatory sense; I mean that the staff people were not professional or clinical people. They were living miracles and walking stories of God's transforming power. I was

overwhelmed with the sense that these stories were more potent for life change than what a clinic or secular rehabilitation center or a jail cell could provide.

## APPENDIX C

### Letter from Dad: Important Data from a Teen Challenge Participant

I submit this letter for triangulation purposes. This person was an agnostic/atheist before entering Teen Challenge. In the letter, he calls the people around him “brothers.” Before Teen Challenge, my father would only use this word in a pejorative way to label black men. Before Teen Challenge, my father thought spiritual events were an intrusion on his schedule. He never asked to go to a spiritual event. Also, the letter confirms the strict ethos that exists at Teen Challenge. Notice the desire for cough drops; they are described here as a luxury. Finally, the letter gives insight on how Teen Challenge responded when their graduates were falling away. The leadership increased the discipline on those in the program.

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Hi guys, how is everything? I’m sorry I’ll miss Davey’s first birthday [grandson] but I’ll make it up when I complete T.C. If you have a promise keeper type gathering at church, I would like to attend. The only way that would be possible would be to call Wayne Gray [Executive Director, Teen Challenge Men’s Center, Sanford, Florida] and ask permission. Since you are my pastor, it may carry some weight if you call. I received a discipline on my [last] pass day [so I cannot ask Wayne myself].

I have put aside [all other concerns] to concentrate on my prayer and trust relationship with God. I have been working in fellowship with some of the young guys in training [Phase II]. I have been somewhat successful in counseling these young men with my experience.

I'm feeling a little anxious about my future. When does trusting God become automatic? I want that so much. I hope God understands my prayers. I talk to Him all day long. I believe that part of my life has changed forever. Why am I so impatient with Him? I am having a tough time with regrets about my past. I can't seem to forgive myself.

I talked with another brother who was going to leave because of a discipline. The whole experience helped me search my own conviction to stay. Because some of the recent graduates have fallen away, they have really stepped up discipline, some of which seem pretty arbitrary. Mine however, was warranted. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time! Praise God! Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup> is my next on-site pass. If possible, could we keep the same menu? The Citrus Luden's Drops were the best! I love you! Kiss Davey for me! Dad.

## APPENDIX E

### Participant Certification

I have read this release of story form and this participant certification form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (407) 644-5222 or e-mail [pastorbrian@asburyumc.com](mailto:pastorbrian@asburyumc.com).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above. By my signature I affirm that I have received a copy of this Participant Certification form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Type/Print Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature

Please contact me to set up the one-hour interview:

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### **A Typical Day at Bonifay—From the Perspective of Participant (P16)**

This Teen Challenge is a fifteen-month military-style residential program for boys. Household and farm chores are part of the daily routine, along with physical training and military drill exercises. The students—called cadets—attend chapel twice a week. But this is not just a fun academy. It is known as a hell-hole.

The younger ones aren't doing that good right now, because they just want to play around and stuff. The first thing they want to do is find a friend, ... someone you can get together with who was kind of like you in your past. The new ones are put in First Platoon, and in First Platoon there is no talking allowed, unless it is to a Drill Instructor. First Platoon lasts until the person changes his ways. The person has to hit certain school goals, the person has to hit a certain amount of PSNC goals and the person has to keep passing his weekly evaluation. At a certain point he gets to go before the Promotion Board. That board will ask him some questions, and either pass him or fail him. If you pass you get to go to Second Platoon, which is the more spiritual platoon. It's looser, you have more freedom, and it is not run by drill instructors but by the students themselves. Phase III is probably considered Master's Challenge. First Platoon usually lasts 3 or 4 months. They teach you how to walk in the Spirit and keep the flesh junk out.

A drill instructor screams for you to wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning. You get a minute and a half to be in line dressed with your personal hygiene. You have to be at attention. Then the drill instructor gives you a left face, and you march down to the end of the barracks and then they tell you to put toothpaste on your toothbrush and start brushing your teeth. They ready step you to the head and to the sink. You are given about 30 seconds to pee and 30 to 45 seconds to shave. Then you have a devotion. Then you



have PT which lasts for an hour. Second platoon gets to go and take care of the farm animals while first platoon is at PT. Then you get a shower, and put on your BDU's (Battle Durable Uniform). Then you get to go to chow. After chow first platoon does clean-up. Then you go to school. School starts at 8 o'clock. At the 11:30 break is lunch. After that, first platoon does kitchen clean-up. Then you go back to school. First platoon gets out of school at 2 o'clock. For second platoon, school gets out at 3 o'clock. At 2 o'clock, first platoon will fall out and go back to barracks and is given time to work on PSNC's [Personal Studies for New Christians]. After PSNC's, you'll get changed over, and you'll go out and march. You'll practice your marching. Then they will have rec time to play kickball or basketball or something like that. After rec, you march inside to wash up. Then you go to chow, or supper at 4:45. After you eat, you go back to the position of attention. After that, they'll ready step you to put up your tray. First platoon then goes to take a shower. First platoon cadets don't have a watch because they don't need one. After shower, the drill instructor will have them shine their boots. Then they can do PSNC's, read the Bible, or read a book. At 8:30, the drill instructor tells them to put up their PSNC's and get back in line with their personal hygiene. After hygiene, each cadet stands in front of their rack. Someone will give a nightly devotion, the pray master will say a prayer, then they're told to hop in their racks and go to sleep. That routine goes on for three or four months.



	P1	A1	P2	A2	A4	P8	P9	P11	A11	P12	A12	P14	P16
<b>Code Words— Spiritual Maturity</b>													
<b>Consistent church attendance/w orship</b>	X							X				X	
<b>Discerning right from wrong</b>								X					
<b>Taking responsibility for choices</b>	X		X		X							X	
<b>Freedom from addiction</b>			X							X			

## APPENDIX H

## Self-Identified Descriptors of Addictive/Destructive Behavior.

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
ADHD		X	X						X	X	X						
Abandoned/ Abusive parents				X		X			X				X	X			
Adopted													X		X		
Alcohol abuse			X	X	X			X	X	X				X	X		X
Arson					X								X				
Broken home/ divorce					X				X			X			X	X	
Cutting	X													X	X		
Depressed	X					X									X	X	
Dropped out of school			X				X		X								
Drug abuse			X	X	X		X	X			X	X		X			X
Eating disorder																X	
Jail time/ arrested			X		X					X				X			X
Hatred of father										X							X
Hatred of God		X			X	X		X									
Hatred of mother							X			X							
Hatred of self/suicidal	X				X									X		X	
Homo- sexuality in family								X									
Hopeless- ness							X					X					
Learning Disability					X												
Murder within family																X	
No pleasure in God			X														
No self- control			X								X						
Occult/ witchcraft				X												X	
People pleaser			X														
Perfection- ist (unable to cope with failure)			X														
Reactive Attachment Disorder													X				
Rebellion/ violence		X	X		X						X						X



## APPENDIX I

## Programming Elements Fostering Spiritual Change

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17
<b>Program elements</b>																	
Animal care								X								X	
Baptism in the Holy Spirit	X								X								
Chapel/worship experiences					X								X			X	
Counselor discernment & understanding						X				X				X			
Disciplines – Consequences)						X					X	X	X	X	X	X	
Family visits										X			X				
Futility/Rock bottom – repetitive behaviors led to overwhelming consequences		X		X		X				X	X		X		X		
Hard work			X														
Influence and example of other students in program provided a compelling vision of how to live						X			X		X	X			X	X	
Length of stay (15 months)			X												X		
Love and respect for counselors		X		X		X		X									
Mission trips					X								X				
PSNC – personal study for new Christians							X										
Special event – Brownsville Revival		X								X							
Special event – Acquire the Fire							X				X		X				
Special event - other		X						X									
Strict but loving atmosphere		X	X	X	X		X					X	X	X		X	

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