



Living Free Survey Findings Spring 2011

Need

Living Free, since its inception, has ministered to countless people in seeking God and His Word for answers to dealing with life's issues. Bible-based curricula on various topics have been designed for weekly study groups, using the small group model. The effectiveness of this program has been testified by numerous participants who have experienced positive changes in their lives. But because the feedback has been self-initiated and anecdotal in nature, the need became apparent for obtaining systematic data over time for the following purposes:

- Programmatic improvement and refinement.
- Identification of future curricular/topical needs.
- Stewardship of resources.
- Accountability to donors.

To this end, this study was undertaken to ascertain the perception of participants, at the completion of their group series, of the effectiveness of the experience.

Method

For this study, the survey method of research was used. The survey instrument (Appendix A) was constructed consisting of a 5-item questionnaire. Using a 4-point Likert scale, each item asks the respondent for the degree of agreement or disagreement with that statement. Additionally, the participant is asked to respond to two write-in questions. Hence, the instrument gathers both 1) quantitative data which provide a broad view of responses aggregated by item and by each individual Living Free group, and also 2) qualitative data which provide a deeper perspective of the respondent's perception through write-in answers.

The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the final session of the group series. The group facilitator asked the group members to participate anonymously in the survey for the purpose of improving the program. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the forms were collected and returned to the Living Free headquarters for compilation and analysis. Although the first two batches were to be used for the pilot study, the responses revealed amazing consistency, indicating the appropriateness of their use as part of the actual study.

For the quantitative data, each item on the questionnaire scored as follows:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Agree
- 4 = Strongly Agree

Each item was worded in the positive, so that no reverse scoring would be necessary. Compilation of questionnaire responses was conducted, after which the mean score was calculated for 1) each item for

each group, 2) each group as an entity, 3) each item for the composite groups, and 4) all questions/all groups composite.

For the qualitative data, all write-in responses were recorded, noted and examined for patterns, and then collapsed into appropriate categories arising from the responses. Some respondents answered with more than one response, all of which were included.

Sample Description

The sample was obtained from those groups that had completed and had returned to Living Free headquarters the questionnaires in the spring of 2011. This consisted of nine different groups, with each group comprising between 3 and 25 participants, totaling 119 individuals. Of this number, 24 (20%) were first-timers, having never completed a Living Free group, while over 54% had completed one to two groups and 25% had completed three or more groups (Table 1. Group Composition). The number, if any, of those declining to complete the questionnaire is not known.

Findings

The findings revealed a remarkable consistency in responses both among the groups and among the individual items (Table 2. Item and Group Means). The overall mean (mean for all groups) was 3.69 out of a possible 4.00, indicating that most items yielded a "4" (Strongly Agree) response. In fact, every respondent answered every item by a "4" (Strongly Agree) or a "3" (Agree), except for one respondent who answered one item by a "2" (Disagree), and another respondent who answered three items by a "1" (Strongly Disagree). This latter phenomenon raises the possibility that this individual might have accidentally answered in reverse. The item that yielded the highest mean (3.76) was the statement, "Living Free has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others."

Most striking is the inverse relationship between group size and mean score of that group. Table 2 lists the groups in descending order from the highest to lowest mean. The group with the highest mean score was the smallest group, with only four participants, and all four marked every item with a "4" (Strongly Agree). In contrast, the largest group with 25 participants yielded the lowest mean score of 3.50. However, caution must be exercised in interpretation because the difference between the highest (4.00) and lowest (3.50) mean is only 0.50, and whether or not the difference is statistically significant or merely due to chance is not known because a correlation test was not conducted. Furthermore, other variables that may have contributed to the difference such as leadership, leadership style, and content of curriculum were not controlled.

The write-in responses yielded considerable depth and richness to the questionnaire items. Nearly every respondent answered the first question: "What specific changes have you made in your life as a result of the Living Free group(s)?" Forming the cluster of the top five categories by frequency was as follows:

1. Deeper relationship with Christ, including more prayer and Scripture study.
2. More open and honest.
3. Improved attitude toward others.
4. Freedom from addiction/greater structure and accountability.

Of the above four categories, the first one was by far the largest cluster, with 39 responses. Table 3 depicts the categories and frequency.

Integrating the principles they were learning and applying them to their lives, many of the respondents were very specific in their write-in answers, as illustrated by the following:

- “I was addicted to pornography and masturbation for 13 years. I am now free from both those addictions and have been for more than a month! I’m so excited to see what God does in the future.”
- “I remarried, to the person God chose for me.”
- “I no longer think I’m the stuff beneath my shoes. I’m more happier and more confident in my decisions. Better person.
- “Total life transformation, you name it and it has been changed, plus 8 months clean and sober.”

The second write-in item asked for completion of the sentence, “The least helpful part of the Living Free Group(s) has been. . .” The vast majority of the respondents left this item blank. Others wrote in such positive statements as, “Everything has been such a blessing!” Another wrote “Everything and everybody so helpful!” Only nine participants responded with feedback intended by this item. Five responses dealt with format or mechanics of the group, such as interruptions/announcements during the group, having one large group time after dinner, having to share a room, and wishing the series were over a longer period of time. Three responses focused on leadership, including allowing monopolization, rushing through lessons, and not being able to talk about Scripture more. And one person wished for more accountability in the group.

Limitations

Inherent in any study is the limitation of bias when the findings are based upon self-report by participants. Yet in this type of group experience, one of the goals is greater self-awareness, and thus it may be argued that participants should be exhibiting greater awareness and thereby are able to report with greater accuracy.

Another limitation is the absence of demographic data. Such data as age, sex, and marital status would have been useful to determine the relationship of such data with the degree of satisfaction with the group experience and the reported degree of growth as a result of this group experience.

A third limitation is the use of different group facilitators. Because the groups are conducted by various churches and organizations around the world, uniformity of leadership is impossible. However, the curriculum is highly structured and the facilitator’s manuals are meticulously detailed that a high degree of standardization can be assumed.

Despite these limitations, the data remain valuable in providing a reasonable form of feedback of participants’ perception of their growth as a result their Living Free group experience.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Demographic data, specifically age, sex, and marital status on the instrument.
Such data would allow for analyses of any relationship between age, sex, and marital status, and the responses to the items. In other words, would a person’s age, sex, or marital status show a statistically significant difference in his/her response to the questionnaire items? The findings

may affect leadership style or future development of curricula if targeted to an age-, sex-, or marital-specific audience.

2. Further statistical analyses.

Further statistical treatments not conducted in this study would indicate possible statistically significant differences among the variables such as group size, the number of groups the respondent had already completed, the specific groups completed, and the means. For instance, the relationship between group size and means appears to exist in this sample (Table 2.), but is the relationship statistically significant?

3. Clarification of instrument question. The question asking for the number of Living Free groups the respondent had completed posed confusion for quite a few respondents who included the current group in their answer. The question should be reworded as follows: “Not counting this group, how many previous groups have you completed?”

Conclusions

Based upon both the quantitative and qualitative data, the respondents reported their experience to be highly valuable because of perceived personal and spiritual growth as suggested by an overall mean of 3.69. The item eliciting the highest item mean (3.76) was the statement, “Living Free has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others.” The group with the fewest participants (4) was the group with the highest mean of 4.00, indicating that each group member responded to each item with “Strongly Agree.” In contrast, the largest group (25) had the lowest mean of 3.50. This may suggest, albeit non-conclusively, that greater gain may be perceived by participants in a smaller group.

The write-in portion of the instrument yielded insight into the areas in which the respondents reported personal growth as a result of their group experience. Among the most frequently reported changes were a closer relationship with Christ, greater openness and honesty, improved attitudes and interpersonal relationships, and freedom from life-controlling issues. The paucity of responses to the question asking for the least helpful part of the group experience and the positive unsolicited feedback written in response to this question, as well as the emotional and spiritual growth reported, suggest an extremely positive experience. That such transformative changes are possible within such a short time frame provide compelling affirmation of the powerful model of the Living Free program.

Table 1. Group Composition

Name of Group	First-time Participants	Completed 1-2 Groups	Completed 3+ Groups	Total Participants
Crossroads	2	1	0	3
Concerned Persons	0	0	3	3
Anger Management	0	5	1	6
Image of God	1	5	8	14
Stepping into Freedom	2	9	2	13
Concerned Persons	3	6	8	17
Insight	10	7	1	18
Insight	4	15	1	20
Free to Grow	2	17	6	25
Total	24	65	30	119

Table 2. Item and Group Means

Name of Group	Number of Participants	*Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Group Mean
Crossroads	3	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Concerned Persons	3	4.00	3.33	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.86
Anger Management	6	3.67	3.67	4.00	3.50	3.67	3.72
Image of God	14	3.79	3.71	3.79	3.42	3.71	3.68
Stepping into Freedom	13	3.62	3.77	3.69	3.46	3.62	3.65
Concerned Persons	17	3.59	3.82	3.71	3.53	3.65	3.62
Insight	18	3.72	3.58	3.61	3.56	3.61	3.60
Insight	20	3.55	3.60	3.60	3.35	3.60	3.54
Free to Grow	25	3.56	3.36	3.48	3.48	3.60	3.50
Question Mean		3.72	3.65	3.76	3.59	3.74	3.69

* Questionnaire Items:

1. My thoughts, attitudes, and actions reflect a positive change because I have greater freedom in Christ through the Living Free group(s).
2. I can identify at least one self-defeating behavior/defense that I am now working on as I seek greater emotional and spiritual health.
3. Living Free has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others.
4. I have seen positive changes in the way I relate to my family and others as a result of the Living Free group(s).
5. Because of Living Free, I am becoming more compassionate towards those who are struggling with life issues.

Table 3. Changes Made

Category	Frequency
Deeper relationship with Christ, including more prayer and Scripture study	40
More open and honest	25
Improved attitude toward others	25
Freedom from addiction/greater structure and accountability	20
Improved thinking, communication, and behavior	14
Encouragement from others/not alone/understood	12
Acknowledgement of self worth	7
Anger management	6
Setting boundaries/decreased enabling/care-fronting	4
Forgiving/asking for forgiveness	4
Other	6



Appendix A

Living Free Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to help us improve the Living Free program by completing this anonymous questionnaire. Thank you for your help!

Please mark an "X" in the box that best reflects your experience in the Living Free group(s).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My thoughts, attitudes and actions reflect a positive change because I have greater freedom in Christ through the Living Free group(s).				
2. I can identify at least one self-defeating behavior/defense that I am now working on as I seek greater emotional and spiritual health.				
3. Living Free has helped me become more honest with myself, God, and others.				
4. I have seen positive change in the way I relate to my family and others as a result of the Living Free group(s)				
5. Because of Living Free, I am becoming more compassionate towards those who are struggling with life issues.				

Please complete the following statements:

1. What specific changes have you made in your life as a result of the Living Free group(s)?

2. The least helpful part of the Living Free Group(s) has been _____

This is my first Living Free group. Yes _____ No, I have completed _____ (how many?) groups.

Please name the group(s) you have completed:
