BIBLICAL LITERACY AMONG MILLENNIAL CHRISTIANS

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Declining biblical literacy among millennial Christians has resulted in errant doctrinal beliefs, declining evangelism, and weak apologetics.

ABSTRACT

The modern Christian has more access to scripture today than in any previous generation. The Bible can be accessed through mobile apps, computers, and the internet as well as by printed copies (Wycliffe.net). Yet, biblical literacy is declining at an alarming rate, especially among the millennial generation (Fulks 9). This thesis will examine why biblical disengagement is occurring and what implications it has on the faith of Christian millennials. To better understand the impact on this generation, research was conducted through a series of research questions:

1. What defines a millennial Christian?
2. Why are they actively leaving the church?
3. Why are they disengaging from the Bible?
4. What cultural influences are impacting millennials in this?
5. How can we re-engage a digitally native generation into seeking biblical truth?

Once the research was conducted, a literature review was completed with the addition of case studies and visual analyses. This collection of data informed a visual solution with the intent of increasing biblical engagement among millennials that would lead to stronger doctrine, an increase in evangelism, and stronger apologetics. The visual solution consisted of a mobile device game that would capture the interest of millennials, educate them about Biblical truths, and develop an online community of fellow believers that would result in a new form of discipleship.

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CHAPTER
INTRODUCTION

BIBLICAL LITERACY AMONG MILLENNIAL CHRISTIANS

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Bible contains the sacred scriptures of Judaism and Christianity describing the basic tenets of the Christian faith. It is the most prolifically printed book in the world and can be found in printed, digital and audio formats. It has impacted western civilization and culture in a number of areas from how governments are run to influencing art, literature and education. It is often considered the most influential body of work ever written. And yet, we live in a time when Biblical literacy or the ability to read the bible with enough understanding to explain its basic meaning is declining dramatically, especially among millennial Christians.

I personally experienced this disconnect between faith and the scriptures at an early age. I was taking classes at my local Catholic church in order to receive my confirmation when I realized that we never directly referred to the Bible in class. I attended, played basketball and listened to teachings, but I never had to open a bible myself or read directly from its pages. I revered the Bible and held it in high esteem, but I was never encouraged to interact with it until several years later when I was invited to a non-denominational youth group. It was only then, when I could read and study for myself that I began to really see the power of the scriptures as God's holy word and how it was the foundation for my Christian faith and worldview.

Since then, I have worked with various youth groups and witnessed this same disconnect that many Christians have with the sacred writings

of their faith. Many individuals that I have worked with claim to believe the Bible but then struggle in having a deep and personal connection with the words within. This has always seemed detrimental to a faith that has existed for thousands of years and has impacted greatly the modern world we live in. As a believer myself I have struggled with the concept that the Truth I hold onto and my faith based worldview is being eroded by what seems to be a purposeful distancing from the roots of the Christian faith.

It was this struggle that encouraged me to research into why so many Christians are choosing to distance themselves from the type of faith development that has been used for generations and what effects this disengagement is having on their spiritual lives. My hope was to find that, perhaps, my experiences were in the minority, and the Bible was still as influential and impactful to the faith today as it has been in generations past.

OBJECTIVES

My research into this problem seeks to find why Christians, millennials specifically, are choosing to distance themselves from the type of faith development that has been traditionally used for generations and what effects this disengagement is having on their spiritual lives. I also hope to investigate whether these believers are finding other sources for retaining a biblical worldview.

This research will drive the conceptualization of an interactive game that can encourage biblical engagement leading to an increase in Biblical literacy with those who participate. Hopefully, this engagement will help create better doctrine, more evangelism, and a greater ability to defend the believer's faith. The mobile game will also incorporate a community-based forum for the purpose of discussing life and encouraging evangelism and discipleship among the users. The goal is to meet them where they are with an educational model that they will more readily relate to using tools they are already comfortable with. As digital natives with a distrust of any institution with a defined sense of identity, history, and authority (Carlson), our current approach of delivering truth solely from a strict, authoritative pulpit is not working. Biblical engagement with millennials seems best served through community, collaboration and interaction (Bauman).

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What defines a millennial Christian?
2. Why are they actively leaving the church?
3. Why are they disengaging from the Bible?
4. What cultural influences are impacting millennials in this?
5. How can we re-engage a digitally native generation into seeking biblical truth?

KNOWLEDGE GAP

There is substantial data showing that less and less Americans read the Bible on a regular basis, millennials included (Fulks). Research also shows that millennials are leaving the church (Kinnaman) and embracing a more relativistic worldview than a biblical worldview (Doberenz). The data did not show, however, if this distancing from the Bible is creating errant doctrine, causing a decline in evangelism or limiting Christian's ability to defend their faith, especially within the church. Assumptions can be made, since the tenets of the Christian faith rely on scriptural knowledge, but research did not reveal these to be issues. Millennial Christians distancing themselves from the Bible is evident and this does pose a considerable threat to the faith, however. With this in mind, more data is needed to show how the church can engage with millennials in order to re-establish a relationship among believers as the "people of one book" (Berding).

SIGNIFICANCE

As more and more Christians distance themselves from the Bible, there is a potential for solid biblical doctrine to become lost. Christian doctrine is based on the tenets of the Bible, but outside influences and a separation from God's word are eroding any accurate understanding of scripture. This limited knowledge or unfamiliarity of the scriptures can be referred to as biblical illiteracy. Without an understanding of what the Bible says, followers of the faith may lose sight of the sacred traditions that form the foundation of Christianity. My personal fear is that the Bible will indeed become nothing more than "a moldy old book and a bad memory" (Reed 154). Without the scriptures as a foundation, the Christian faith could eventually become a lost relic, as well.

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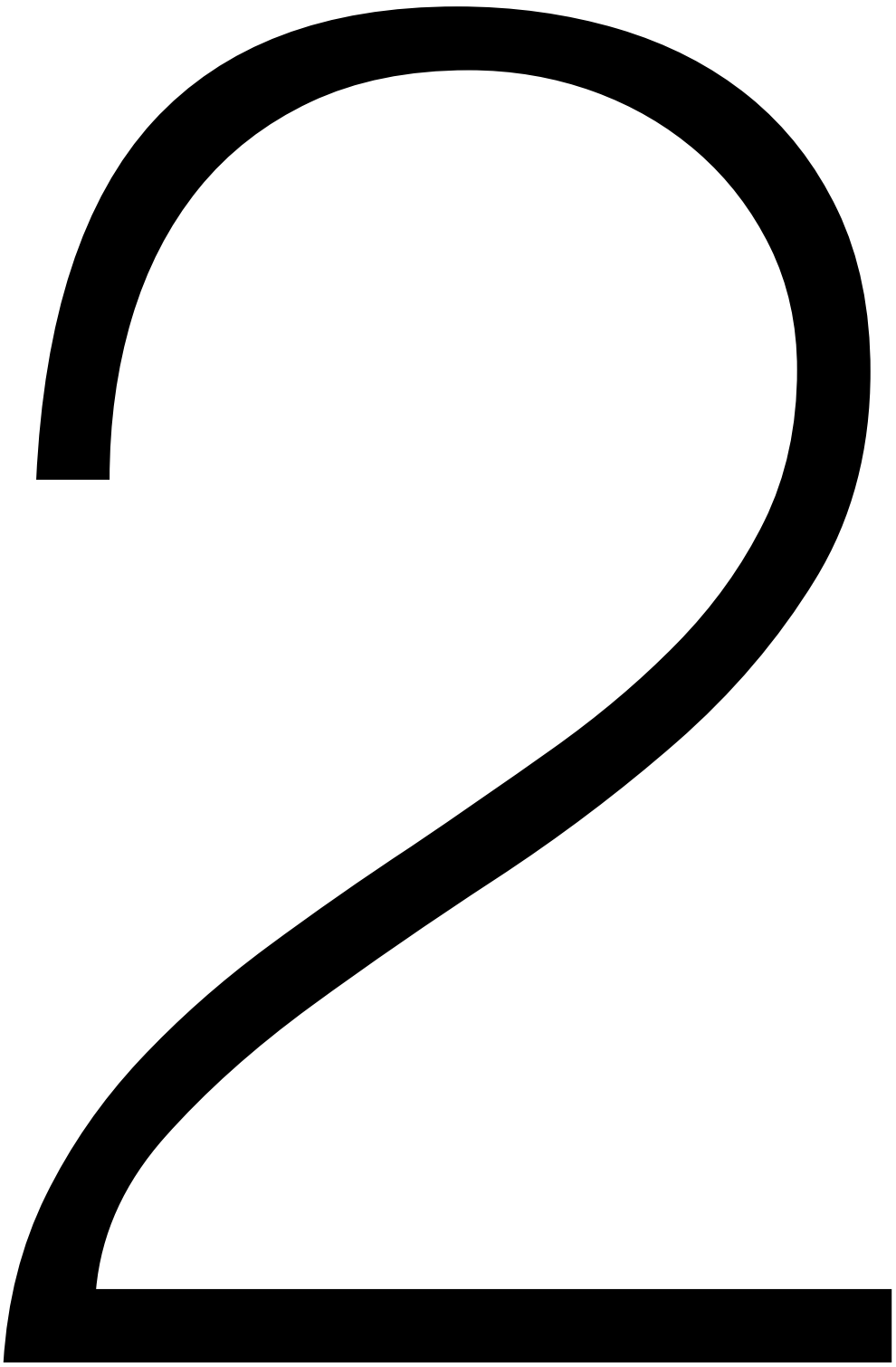
CHAPTER
RESEARCH

RESEARCH RATIONALE

The Bible has impacted the world for thousands of years. It has made a profound impact on Western civilization and on many cultures around the world. It has influenced government, art, literature, and education and is considered the most influential body of work ever written. The Bible has directly and indirectly influenced all aspects of life including politics, marriage and family life, social justice, medical care, and much more. Yet, this influential book is being read less and less with each generation. This thesis hopes to identify why millennial believers of a faith based on this book are no longer engaging with its teachings directly and how this lack of interest is impacting their worldview along with an understanding of their faith.

" Yet, this influential book is being read less and less with each generation

RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting this research, case studies and visual analyses will be the primary methods of research. Case studies are large scale projects that are used to study complex amounts of information. This thesis will benefit from case studies as they tend to gather information from surveys and interviews that the researcher will be unable to conduct himself. The case studies used in this research are Evangelism through Online Gaming, The Christ and Coffee Facebook Page, and Role-Playing and Religion. Each case study focuses on millennials and their interactions with faith through technology or gaming with an emphasis on how these interactions may or may not increase a deeper understanding of faith and belief.

Visual analysis is the study of images in visual and material culture. The visual analyses will help guide direction and aesthetic choices when it comes to creating a visual solution. The 3 artifacts chosen to determine what aesthetic choices can relate to or connect to the problem are the Alabaster Bible Series, the YouVersion Bible App, and the David and Goliath Bible Game. Each of these were chosen as they are marketed towards the intended audience with the goal of increasing Bible interactivity with the user. An analysis of these artifacts should help determine a visual direction for the solution as well as influence successful methodologies of interacting with millennials through a digital space while encouraging community or fellowship among its users.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It has been widely studied that Biblical literacy is declining within the United States even among self-described Christians. Substantial data shows that fewer Americans read the scriptures on a regular basis or are even aware of what is being expressed within its pages making it difficult for them to understand what makes good doctrine. A misunderstanding of doctrine leads to other issues among believers like a lack of understanding what evangelism is and what its purpose is for. Many Christians struggle to defend their faith because of this, since they have no clear foundation for what they claim to believe. There is even less data available in terms of the millennial generation's level of Biblical literacy. This paper will research Biblical literacy among millennial Christians, how it affects their faith and belief system and identify possible methods of reaching out to them.

The Millennial Generation

Millennials are the generation of people born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 27 to 42 in 2023). Millennials have been impacted by historical events which, more than likely, has affected their worldview. Many millennials "were between the ages of 5 and 20 when the 9/11 terrorist attacks shook the nations" (Dimock). This means they were old enough to understand the impact of that moment and it probably shaped their understanding of religion and extremism. They also grew up during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which helped contribute to the political polarization that it is evident in our current political system. They took part in the 2008 election where the younger vote made a

substantial impact on helping elect the first black president. Millennials came of age during the height of an economic recession shaping their perspective on life in general. Millennials are also known as the most diverse adult generation, both racially and ethnically, in this nation's history, although Generation Z will end up being more diverse.

> **"Social media, constant connectivity and on-demand entertainment and communication are innovations that millennials" (Dimock) grew up with.**

They are a unique group of people because they are the first generation to grow up completely immersed in technology. They are referred to as digital natives because of this. Baby Boomers grew up with television and the introduction of mass media, while Generation X grew up as computers began to make an impact. Both technological advancements expanded their lifestyles and connection to the world dramatically, but millennials came of age when the internet exploded. "Social media, constant connectivity and on-demand entertainment and communication are innovations that millennials" (Dimock) grew up with. All these things helped shape millennials into the adults they are today and may have had an impact on why they have distanced themselves from the Bible.

Self-Identified Christians

Moving forward with the research there is a noticeable discrepancy between self-identified Christians versus self-identified disciples or those who actually possess a Biblical worldview. In fact, "the vast majority of American adults (69%) self-identify as 'Christian' and embrace many basic tenets of the faith. But a closer look shows

at the same time, many in this group hold views clearly in conflict with traditional teachings and only 9% actually possess a Biblical worldview" (Barna 1). Many self-identified Christians believe in non-Biblical perspectives such as karma, personal moral truth, and the concept that if people are good enough, they can earn their way to heaven. The term Christian has become generic as "people who are simply religious, or regular churchgoers, or perhaps people who want a certain reputation or image embrace the label 'Christian'" (Barna 8). The title "Christian" no longer represents those who reflect a deep commitment of pursuing Christ so the data focusing on millennial Christians and Biblical illiteracy may be incorrect.

The Nones

Among millennials there is a designated group of people referred to as the "nones". Nones are religiously unaffiliated and made up one-fifth of the American public in 2012 (Chase). The interesting thing about the nones is that even though they are unaffiliated with any specific religion, they are not completely irreligious. Many still hold onto some basic practices and beliefs. They may believe in God, have a sense of being spiritual, and participate in daily prayer. Some suggest that the nones might simply be people who have not found the right church, but the nones have made a purposeful decision to not join a church. They see religious organizations as being too concerned with money and power. They feel that churches are

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too focused on rules and that some are too involved in politics. This suspicion of religious organizations has led to a declining membership in churches.

Biblical Disengagement

The American Bible Society conducts research on a yearly basis that seeks to understand the United States' relationship with the Bible, Christian faith, and the church. Looking at the evidence presented, Jeffery Fulks states that "Fewer people in America are engaging with the Bible… it continues on a downward trajectory" (Fulks vi). This should be alarming since Christian doctrine is based fundamentally on the tenets that are presented in the pages of the Holy Bible. In fact, scholars tend to identify American evangelicals by their belief in the absolute authority of the Bible. "Christians used to be known as 'people of one book'… They memorized it, meditated on it, talked about it, and taught it to others" (Berding 2). Since 2020, however, those who have used the Bible three or more times per year, outside of Sundays at church, have dropped from 50% to 39% and only 24% of Americans admit to using the Bible on their own, at least once a week (Fulks 7). Only 33% of millennials would even consider themselves as Bible users.

This is not a case of access as the Bible is the most prolifically printed book in the world. The British and Foreign Bible society estimates that the number of Bibles printed is around 5 – 7 billion copies worldwide as of 2021 (guinnessworldrecords.com). Bibles are available everywhere and not just in print. Americans have access to the complete Bible in print, digital, and audio formats in up to 724 languages (Wycliffe. net). Technology makes the scripture even more accessible as there

are plenty of websites whose sole purpose is Biblical engagement. Not only do these sites have multiple versions and translations of the Bible, but they even host thousands of studies and extra Biblical texts for the average reader to pour through. API.Bible even offers its API or Application Programming Interface to anyone who wants to connect their software components to any of the 1500 Bible versions across more than 1000 languages. Even with all of this access and the fact that 87% of American households own a Bible, only 11% of them have read the Bible in its entirety, at least once (Smietana). The book of Amos describes not reading the scriptures like a "famine of hearing the words of the Lord"(Amos 8:11), but the issue here today is not access, but desire. It would be one thing if access were the issue. Americans are choosing to starve themselves of the scriptures, millennials included. What makes this even more interesting is that "Americans revere the Bible – but, by and large, they don't read it" (Gallup, Castelli). There is value placed on it as the holy word of God, but for one reason or another the desire to open it and read it for oneself is lacking. "Indeed, in light of polls suggesting that Biblical literacy is precipitously declining, Beal wittily observes that even while 75% of Americans report believing that the Bible is the word of God, 'the Bible appears to be the most revered book never read.'" (Juzwik 330). Evangelicals tend to turn to their pastors, other books, or external sources out of a possible distrust in themselves to study the Bible. There are those that see the complexities of the scripture as something meant to be understood by those educated in the field and not by the average user. Another possibility for this distancing from the Bible could be that "the Bible has become separated from its deeper theological material, trimmed down to simple takeaways like "believe in Jesus and you'll go to Heaven" (Doberenz 8). Social media and the internet have

changed the way Americans communicate. Character limitations could be part of the cause as apps like X, formerly Twitter, used to limit the character count to 280. Shorter attention spans and a competitive attitude across social media to grab the viewers' attention have left users using less to express more. The problem with doing this with scripture is that verses taken out of context can really twist the meaning and water down the Word of God. The Bible has been reduced to quick sayings like "God is love" that can be applied to a number of unBiblical applications without ever clarifying what "God is love" truly means.

Cultural Influences

This strained relationship with the Bible is evident among Christian millennials who are involved in church and claim to have a personal belief in God but lack a deeper understanding of Biblical knowledge. Doberenz states that secular and cultural ideologies on being nice blended with softened tenets of Christianity has weakened doctrine into a faith that will not cause conflict of any type. "By being taught to tolerate diverse beliefs, it's difficult for a teen or millennial to see other views as wrong" (Doborenz 7). As mentioned earlier, millennials are a highly diverse population that was raised with an ideology of acceptance. They were taught to embrace their differences and not question them even if other's beliefs contradicted their own. In an effort to be tolerant or accepting, Christians may find themselves less confident in what they believe and less eager to represent themselves

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as believers who can defend their faith.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Doborenz compares this to Christian Smith's concept of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism in which Smith states that young people believe in a combined set of moral statutes that are not directly associated to one single belief system or religion. Part of these beliefs "consists of a god who created and orders the world watching over human life on earth. This god wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, but does not need to be particularly involved in their lives, except when he is needed to resolve a problem. Being happy and feeling good about oneself is the central goal in life. When they die, good people will go to heaven." (Doberenz 5). This perception of God and the lack of Biblical knowledge to counter it has led to a watered-down understanding of the doctrine presented in the scriptures. The Bible is based on absolutes and makes things clear, especially in terms of salvation. In fact, Romans 3:11 clearly states that "None is righteous, no, not one" proving that there are no good people. Ephesians 2:8 says that salvation is a "gift of God, not of works" so any thought of doing good things to earn a heavenly position is false. This ideology seems based more on contemporary culture and its surroundings than the literal Biblical approach that once defined the evangelical movement. The problem at hand is that the millennial generation seems to embrace this approach in terms of what they believe.

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> **Christians may find themselves less confident in what they believe and less eager to represent themselves as believers who can defend their faith.**

Relativism

Millennials are also struggling with a moral intuitionist philosophy which claims that right and wrong are self-evident. There is no reason for a Bible to dictate rightness or wrongness when a person can intuitively know these truths. The concept is that right and wrong stem from an immediate consciousness or feeling. It may come as a sensation or by a deeper understanding. There doesn't seem to be a solid source from where it comes. There are a majority of students who do "not consider 'the Bible the best guide for morality' and thought there were 'better ways of knowing right from wrong'" (Reed 156). They would prefer to go by their feelings or the situation at hand to determine their choices. Some may search the scriptures for guidance but if they fail to find an appropriate or "good" answer, they want to leave both the church and their faith. They tend use the Bible to reinforce what they already assume to be right or wrong based on cultural influence. If the answers they get go against their initial feeling, they are free to discard the Bible and assume it must have errors. This form of relativism is becoming more and more common as many people believe that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to the culture or society. There are no absolutes. Right and wrong are defined by the time and place and nothing more. This leads to believing that one person's right is someone else's wrong and, somehow, that it is all OK.

A somewhat clear example of moral intuitionism can be seen with the issue of homosexuality. A vast majority of both secular and spiritual people endorse gay marriage. When looking specifically at self-identified believers 50% endorse gay marriage (Reed 157). When asked about whether homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children the number of endorsements go up. This is a divisive subject and

millennials would rather not start a conflict than contradict their beliefs. One-third of millennials become unaffiliated with any church because of the church's position on gays and lesbians. Millennials tend to support gay rights and "those who have changed their opinion on gay marriage (in favor) have done so because they know a homosexual person and thus are more likely to see gay rights as an extension of human rights" (Reed 157).

Part of this reasoning is based on what is known as "Spiritual Tinkering" (Doberenz). Spiritual tinkering is sometimes seen as taking sections of a thought-system for a personal agenda. People will take what they need from culture and then utilize whatever resources they have at their disposal to make sense of what they don't understand. If they are not satisfied with the results, they find other resources that will make sense to them. This pick and choose philosophy allows them to select sections of the Bible that reinforce their worldview and discard the portions that do not fit diminishing the importance of the Bible as the source of truth. Some tinkerers, however, tinker by focusing on different areas that are Biblically sound. They might dabble in fasting or praying in different languages or other tenets of Christianity from various denominations. This may not be as bad since they draw from an eclectic variety of Christian traditions without submitting to one specific institutional authority. Where one form of tinkering focuses entirely on the self and the personal agenda, the other form remains focused on God but uses different avenues to retain that focus.

Similar to the negative tinkering approach in interacting with the Bible is to view it through the lens of personal experiences instead of as the written word of God. People find value in the scriptures as it relates to their current life situations only. "Life-relevance is assumed, and this assumption may drive readers to read the Bible until struck by something that is relevant" (Franzen 397). The search is driven by the situation not by a desire to get closer to God. In doing so "the relevance is mediated by whatever life experiences the reader is having at the time, a familiar text can still become new and surprise him or her as the application for what is read has changed (Franzen 397). This can lead to a repeated pattern of reading and re-reading as each new experience might offer a new perspective on verses and stories that have been read multiple times. The scripture stays the same, but the application varies from experience to experience. The problem with this is that the Bible becomes a sort of magic eight ball that only has value when life needs adjusting. Turning to the Bible becomes reactive and not proactive, so there is no reason to refer to the book until life gets murky. The Bible becomes something that only has value when it is needed.

This fleeting view of the Bible's value is even found within faith-based institutions like Christian universities and, surprisingly, within Biblical studies courses. Randall Reed described his personal experiences in teaching Biblical studies at the undergraduate level and noticed a clear difference in millennial's attitude toward the Bible when compared to previous generations. He notes that millennials, in general, seem to be leaving the church in droves. Considering their view of a Biblical studies course he says, "How can the Bible be seen as relevant and worth a sixteen-week investment to a student for whom

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> *The Bible becomes something that only has value when it is needed.*

the meaning of the text lies somewhere between a moldy old book and a bad memory" (Reed 154). The Bible's relevance is being diminished and its importance is dropping in the eyes of this generation.

Leaving the Church

This diminishing view of the Bible, along with a mistrust of church organizations, is part of what is pushing millennials away from church, but so is outside cultural influence. "Cognitively, many cannot reconcile what they have learned outside of church with lessons taught inside church" (Chase 19). This tends to push millennials away from traditional church settings and the Bible that is used as the fundamental text of the faith. This also leads to a cognitive disconnect in which past church attenders no longer believe in what Christianity teaches. In David Kinnaman's book, *You Lost Me*, it states that 59% of formerly attending young adults are leaving the church in the United States altogether (Kinnaman). Along with this cognitive disconnect millennials are also experiencing a spiritual disconnect in which believers have little or no experience of the spiritual side of God. They fail to see what is being taught from the pulpit or from the scriptures as truth because they are not experiencing the things being described to them as truth. "Spiritually, the millennials have little to no experience with the supernatural presence of God, which could supplement the church's teachings and provide a personal witness of the veracity of the faith" (Chase 19). The act of prayer can be a catalyst in this sense. Millennials may not feel that the act of prayer

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is doing what it is supposed to be doing or that they feel any spiritual connection in the process. This can cause problems because prayer as seen as one of the most basic aspects of faith. If the millennials do not feel that prayer is working, then they will assume that it is a fraud or simply not for them. This lack of the supernatural can also lead to a deep questioning of whether what they believe and what they read is true.

Another force that is driving millennials away from the church and possibly their faith, stems from what they have seen of the church through passive observation. Millennials are aware of the beliefs, doctrines, customs, and behaviors of those in church leadership. They are also wise enough to recognize hypocrisy or the "behavior that fails to conform to publicly held beliefs and standards of morality" (Chase 22). They perceive that the actions of Christians and Christian leaders often contradict the commands of the Bible. This creates a deep sense of distrust of those in charge. Of the most impactful hypocritical observations and most likely to drive them away from the church, are those that involve sexual scandals.

This distrust of authority combined with a relativist truth, mentioned earlier, make it difficult for millennials, especially "nones", to be comfortable in a faith community. They may appreciate the acceptance and love that a faith-based community can offer, but their experiences keep them from becoming too comfortable. Older "Christians define their faith by identifying with and participating in a specific faith community or denomination, finding spiritual comfort in a shared personality and history to which the individual can also contribute" (Carlson 709), but millennials are leery of anything that has a clear

sense of identity, history, and authority. Millennials are often frustrated with the strict, authoritative rule of evangelical churches and the lack of the spiritual. "We're not leaving the church because we don't find the cool factor there; we're leaving the church because we don't find Jesus there" (Carlson 710).

Defending the Faith

However, not all millennials are leaving the faith, but the battle between faith and culture has left many of them struggling to understand and express what it is they believe. Outside influences like "skepticism of institutions, tolerance of other faiths, rapid global access to a variety of ideas and truths, and a postmodern sense that all truth is relative" (Carlson 705) are continuously leading believers to question their faith making it difficult to defend it. Fear of talking about their faith in public and fighting against a secular culture along with a lack of a Christian denomination's teaching about evangelism leave the current generation unable to adequately represent Christianity. This pressure along with a "fear of making exclusivist claims, discomfort with and ignorance of the Bible, and their own doubt and struggles with their faith" (Carlson 706) hinder the abilities of millennials to stand firm for their convictions. They are lacking a solid understanding of what they believe and this leaves them afraid to speak to their personal experience in their faith.

There is also substantial pressure for Christian millennials in accepting of all things even if what they are expected to accept contradicts what they are being taught in the Bible. Any sign of contradicting the social norms or causing conflict can lead to ostracization or ridicule from the secular culture. The fear resulting from such a response becomes

another reason for Biblical illiteracy and leaving the faith, along with "jealousy or hostility from the outside" (Sellers 114). This goal to be accepting also creates a problem when tasked with the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey." In fact, "these generations want to remain accepting of their peers of other faiths or no faith at all, without insisting that the eternal salvation of these peers depends on whether or not they become Christian (Carlson 705). Their fear stops them from doing what the Bible calls them to and denies their peers the opportunity to hear the good news.

Engagement of a Digitally Native Generation

Despite the pressures to remain true to the faith and the tenets of the Bible "there are… millennials who are faithful church members, and it is to these generations we must turn to discover and equip evangelists who can speak about their faith to their peers" (Carlson 703-704). These faithful members are willing, but the lack the support and training that can be used to go forth and evangelize, as well as defend their faith. The question then becomes how to inspire a generation to seek truth in the word of God so that they can claim a faith of their own that they would be bold enough to share with their friends?

> **" Fear of talking about their faith in public and fighting against a secular culture … leave the current generation unable to adequately represent Christianity.**

To begin with, millennials are a social generation that has been raised on technology and its rapid growth in communication. They "have come of age in the midst of a space-time crunch, an unprecedented time of exponential increases in the speed of communication" (Bauman 301). They have lived with social media and taken part of the constant barrage of sharing images, videos, and text in order to define their identity to anyone and everyone who follows their feed. Their primary source for knowledge does not lie in a parent, pastor, or teacher but online. Millennials "turn first to the internet to communicate, understand, learn, find, and do many things" (Bauman 303). This means that educational settings and delivery methods need to change in order to meet the needs of this generation. Their minds are rewired and unable to learn in traditional methods. The reality is that most churches still preach and teach in the same way they have for many years.

Most churches have a typical structure in which a pastor, priest or teacher stands before the body or congregation as the voice of authority. They speak and the church listens. Occasionally, membership might respond in affirmation, depending on the denomination, but rarely is there a question asked or discussion started. Interactivity between members and leadership may take in small groups, but never during service. Millennials distrust this approach. They have seen enough in their lifetimes that they fail to place faith upon one person as the

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disseminator of knowledge. They have experienced the internet. They know that knowledge can come from a number of locations and this archaic form of teaching does not serve them.

These traditional approaches fail to reach and inspire this generation to get into the Bible. "New educational practices are needed to reach and engage the millennials" (Bauman 301). As a social generation, they need collaborative, team-building activities that help them gain knowledge and prepare them for life, both personal and professional. As "spiritual tinkerers" they need to be allowed to combine "...together ideas about spirituality from many sources, especially through conversations with friends" (Carlson 704). Millennials tend to combine religions together and draw upon the non-religious, including the sciences, as sources for meaning. They would rather discuss an issue and create dialogue then sit passively and here someone's truth. Millennials wish to experience truth. They want to draw content from multiple locations and analyze it in search of truth. This concept of gaining Biblical knowledge by studying it in conjunction with multiple sources is not new. Even Francis Schaeffer's "apologetic concern is that we do not dichotomize the Bible's message as being true only in the religious sphere while fallible in the realms where science and history can verify its claims" (Nyman 9). In other words, if the Bible is true it will be absolutely true through whatever cultural or societal lens it is seen through. One cannot separate the Bible from all aspects of life. One cannot compartmentalize scripture and view it only as scripture. The Bible should be used as a reference to all aspects of life. "We live in a time when pastors and teachers need to have knowledge across all other fields, not just the Bible and its contents" (Sellers 115). Since culture is having a negative impact on Biblical literacy through

external influences, these studies seem to suggest that using those same influences to prove Biblical truths will help switch things around. According to Bauman, "the remedy lies in teaching basic religious literacy, especially Biblical literacy" (Bauman 310), but the question remains in how, since much of the research suggests that millennials simply learn differently.

Methods of Engagement

It is evident that millennials are impacted by the culture that they are a part of. It may be analog or digital, but outside influences and numerous resources are impacting the millennial worldview. These influences seem to overpower any impact the church or the Bible may have. "Katie Edwards has proposed that we need to be less anxious about the warnings of decreasing Biblical literacy in Western culture and instead note that 'Biblical stories are woven in the very fabric of contemporary culture' (Phillips 47). If this is true, then shouldn't basic Biblical knowledge exist among millennials. Yet, "60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments" (Mohler). If Biblical stories are indeed woven in all aspects of the current culture, a better question would be why isn't it clear or evident to all people? Or does the world not see the impact of the Bible in the current culture because it has long disconnected itself from the Bible. Perhaps, through an understanding of the Bible people could then see how interwoven it is with life.

Millennials struggle with understanding the Bible because they are more impacted by the power of visuals over text and the Bible is text heavy. This isn't just a scriptural issue since "appreciation for literature in general has declined among millennials and the fallout is

that reading printed Bibles have become less of a focus in the digital age" (Kherlopian 1). Millennials are simply not reading printed text and prefer digital if possible. In fact, the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States stated that only one third of 13-year-olds are daily readers and 1 in 5, 17-year-olds read any literature at all. Millennials are simply not reading books, least of which is the Bible. "To reach millennials there needs to be a stronger emphasis on utilizing digital media to create new innovative styles of ministry" (Kherlopian 3). Biblical learning does not have to be done in the same manner as it has always been. Biblical literacy cannot be developed in the same way as it has in the past. The Israelites passed knowledge down from generation to generation through oral tradition and this method eventually went away with the availability of the printed text. In medieval times "the majority of men and women experienced the Bible through a carefully structured array of rituals and images, sermons and chants.

"
"To reach millennials there needs to be a stronger emphasis on utilizing digital media to create new innovative styles of ministry" (Kherlopian 3).

Indeed, one could argue that this audio-visual, aesthetic experience of the Bible has dominated Bible engagement over the last two thousand years" (Phillips 30). Even then, there were multiple modes of engagement. It was not simply a sit and listen approach to learn the Bible. The body interacted. They took part. "The church will benefit in developing platforms for engagement inside and outside the church, both online and offline (Knoetze 6). There is value in embracing the technology that millennials have been raised in. They are digital natives, so it comes natural for them to connect and grow this way.

One should also consider that "the Bible as a whole, as well as its constituent texts, have always been part of visual culture: as stone tablets, or scrolls, or codices; as texts scrawled in graffiti or painted on murals; as mosaics embedded in villas or texts on walls" (Phillips 31). In the past, Biblical illiteracy was due to actual illiteracy, but even then, Biblical engagement had to be facilitated in any way it could. Often this was through the mediated Bible. Oddly enough, the Bible remains a mediated text in today's digital world. It is engaged by visual and material culture, by performances and exhibitions, and in devotions and interpretations. So, Biblical literacy is developed through multiple facets not just through reading. Often the engagement happens thorough cultural expression. One example of the Bible being mediated by culture is in "A Charlie Brown Christmas". The cartoon includes a fifty-second recitation of Luke 2:8-14. "This section of the programme was highly controversial at the time in that it stripped away all of the usual accompaniment to the Bible on screen and instead gave the words to a contemporary child without backing track, additional visuals, or humour" (Phillips 32). The only connection to the Bible is the voice of the young boy and yet, it creates a moment in time in which we are engaged with scripture. It seems that it is possible to experience the impact of the content within its pages without the Bible being physically present.

Haid Kherlopian also used a mediate Bible approach when he created a Facebook page that hosted short videos called "Christ and Coffee" that focused on Biblical principles. He then created a "Christ and

> ## "
> ### They are digital natives, so it comes natural for them to connect and grow this way.

Coffee Viewer Survey" or CCVS and invited the 342 likers of his page to fill it out. Of the 70 that completed the survey, 50 were chosen on the following criteria: 19-34 years of age; and they have watched at least two episodes of Christ and Coffee. "Though 98 percent of participants were involved with church at least once a month, only 32 percent read the Bible daily" (Kherlopian 69).

The outcome of the study showed that there was an improvement in the participant's Living the Word Improvement score after watching the videos on Facebook. According to his data, 48 of the 50 who participated had an increase in their score. This indicated that they wished to apply the principles to their lives, but there was no way in determining whether they went through with it or not. Much like "A Charlie Brown Christmas", this study did not directly get into the scriptures in order to teach Biblical truth. Instead, he created videos with the intent that they would inspire the viewer to apply Biblical principles to their lives. Some videos were sermonettes and were like a Sunday sermon only shorter and, possibly, more humorous. The second type of videos were what he called listing. The listing videos consisted of facts about scripture that followed a specific theme. An example of a listing video was entitled The Top Five Fatalities in the Bible. The video mentioned David beheading Goliath, Jael stabbing a tent peg in Sisera's temple, Jezebel being thrown of a balcony to be eaten by dogs, Eutychus falling asleep during a sermon then falling out a window to his death, and the number one fatality was Jesus on the cross, defeating Satan, sin, and death all at once. The videos did encourage the viewer to read the scriptures after they were presented, but the Bible was not the primary source of the lesson. However, they did direct the viewer back to the Bible.

Millennials are captivated by games. They were raised on games, both digital and analog. As a generation, they enjoy competition, but are also a very community focused group whether online or in person. In terms of learning, millennials want to have a practical and pragmatic approach to learning content. The thought of learning for learning's sake, does not sit well with them. One form of game play that resonates well with millennials is role-playing games.

A study by Adam Porter focused on using role-playing games as a method to teach Biblical studies courses. The idea for this came to him after attending a conference and listening to Gary Yamasaki talk about improving student attendance and engagement through the "Acts Game". Porter took a similar concept for his New Testament class. He assigned students to different teams. The teams were Pharisees, Sadducees, Romans, Zealot, Essenes and Christians. They were then expected to read Theissen's Shadow of the Galilean (1987) to understand the society of that time period and the different sects of first century Judea, as well as other historical authors. Porter would then introduce the Gospels and the student wrote about how they were represented in the Gospels from the perspective of their assigned sect. He continued this format throughout the New Testament and had various discussions between the students based on their differing viewpoints. In order to do well in the class, the students had to prove everything they discussed from their research. An added benefit of the process was that the students began to empathize with their characters. They began to see each sect in a different light because of the experience and not based on previous bias or assumption. The process increased engagement taught the students to think critically

about scripture, and they learned about first century Judea.

Considering the traits of millennials and their affinity towards games, the study showed that a similar approach could be used in order to increase Biblical literacy among them. This case may have been conducted in a classroom setting, but there is no reason why something similar could be used in a digital space. The community aspect must be of key importance. Plenty of games capitalize on this such as Everquest or World of Warcraft. If role-playing can increase interest and independent thinking in a class on the New Testament, then it is obvious that something similar could be used for a general Biblical studies approach or broken down in sections by Biblical principles or time periods.

In terms of evangelism, Michael McMullen's dissertation on Evangelism through Online Gaming is an example of using the tools of the digital natives to reach out to them and combine what they know and create new opportunities. He notes that because this methodology was new it was "difficult to overcome the preconceived negative thoughts toward online gaming evangelism" (McMullen 130). However, he found in his research that by the end, the subjects he worked with had a different perception about online gaming and how it can serve the body. This was done by allowing the critics to experience the game. Not just the game play, but to watch others play and interact with each other through the community chat. The community chat allowed for

> **" As a generation, they enjoy competition, but are also a very community focused group whether online or in person.**

participants playing the game to discuss their personal lives and faith. This helped the observers realize that the game was much more than just a game. It was a community of believers building each other up and supporting each other. McMullen noted that the strength of the online gaming community is in the community aspect of it. The same can be said about the fellowship of believers. The church is called to come together and be as one and McMullen found that that same attitude and desire for unity existed in the digital realm. By incorporating Biblical truth and theology into the online community, the members began growing in faith together. "A community of 'trust' develops over time with those of similar interests in an online community" (McMullen 133) and the same could be said of a community of believers.

The community is more than a place to play a game, but a family of people who may never meet face-to-face. It `would be easy to discount this community as nothing more than a chat room until you read the stories of twenty-four members who were rescued from suicide throughout the span of one year because of the Minecraft online gaming ministry (McMullen). Members are from different locations and probably do not physically know each other, but there was a bond and community built that people were willing to be vulnerable and others were supportive. We often see the online world as nothing more than a game and possibly fake, but this study was able to show that evangelism can exist in a digital chat room.

> **" Substantial data shows that millennials are leaving the church, but at the same time they have an interest in the spiritual or religious.**

There is plenty of research depicting the declining rates of Biblical interaction and literacy among average Americans and self-identifying Christians. The breakdown by generations, specifically millennials, is lacking and there are even less studies that identify the effects that Biblical illiteracy has on this generation's faith and worldview. Substantial data shows that millennials are leaving the church, but at the same time they have an interest in the spiritual or religious. While there is data showing that their faith is often influenced by external cultural forces resulting in a weakened understanding of traditional doctrine, there is little proof of whether declining evangelism or weak apologetics is a direct result of Biblical illiteracy. More research is needed that is focused on the Christian millennials and how a lack of Biblical understanding is affecting their Christian worldview.

CASE STUDIES

Evangelism Through Online Gaming

The following case study was initiated by Michael A. McMullen for a Dissertation presented to the Ashbury Theological Seminary in May of 2022. The motivation behind the project was to determine what, if any, objections the members of South Texas Nazarene church had to online gaming for the purpose of creating an evangelistic online gaming experience that tried to avoid those objections. McMullen focused on the generational gap between Generation X and Generation Z because there is considerable difference in their view of and use of technology between the two generations. Generation X experienced the beginning stages of the technology rise, but Generation Z has been completely immersed in it since birth. In terms of faith and spiritual learning, Generation X prefers attending a physical church while Generation Z "seems to push away at church models that seem to not appeal to their generation" (McMullen 73). McMullen's project hoped to bridge the gap between the two generations through the use of technology.

McMullen's project began with questionnaires to gather data on the issues members of the church had with online gaming. Those included in the study were participants with varied roles in the church. The questionnaires consisted of both closed ended and open-ended questions. The closed ended questions were created to gather concrete data while the open-ended questions were intentionally written to get an understanding of attitudes and perceptions held by the subjects toward online gaming.

McMullen included a participant observation portion that focused on

the subjects' reactions to people participating in mobile gaming apps and online evangelism gaming models. In this portion of the study, he researched how the participants interacted with gaming modules that used three methods, evangelizing, teaching, and prayer. This was done by measuring their reactions of a web application, as well as watching them explore Minecraft while going through a teaching lesson inside the game. The third method was by having them go through a three-dimensional model of Solomon's Temple "where the elements of the temple were utilized in a way to expose prayer to the individual participant through the Old Testament virtual environment. The participant observation also included analyzing the rate of technology adoption in online game evangelism and chat rooms.

McMullen, then, observed the participants through interviews and then conducted a focus group after the participant observation portion of the project. During the focus group, the participants were asked to discuss their reactions to what they observed previously. They were also asked whether an online evangelical gaming model could be used in their ministry or other aspects of church business. There were four areas discussed in the focus group: communication to Generation Z, online gaming, chat obstacles in relation to their church, and the adoption rate of those surveyed to new technology like online gaming.

Initial problems the project faced were early biased opinions about

> **"**
> **...there can be spiritual benefits through an online community and methods of building Christ-like relationships through technology.**

the subject matter from the Generation X participants. These were based on their own personal experience of gaming which, for most of them, consisted of single player gameplay. This also caused the subjects to struggle in seeing online play as "real". "It was difficult at times… to realize they were actually participating in the gaming module with users that are real life players" (McMullen 148). They had little experience with community-based gaming. Other issues included game mechanics as games are more complex and require more methods of maneuverability. Time spent in the game overcame the issue, but it was still a challenge.

Overall, the project resulted in an increased interest in the possibility of online gaming as an evangelistic tool. McMullen found in his research that by the end, the subjects he worked with had a different perception about online gaming and how it can serve the body. One of the strengths of online gaming is the community aspect of it. Much like any community, it takes time to develop a "community of trust" (McMullen 133) much like in real life.

This case study focuses on attitudes towards online gaming and Generation Z, but there are many similarities between Generation Z and millennials. Much like Generation Z, millennials are also digital natives and have a strong connection with the digital world. This project succeeded in increasing awareness to the older generations of online evangelistic tools, as well as lessened the stigma that online gaming has.

Based on the information from this study it is evident that there can be spiritual benefits through online gaming. The study also shows

that online communities and different methods of building Christ-like relationships through technology are possible. This study and the concept of meeting millennials where they are, even if it is online or through a video game proves that evangelism and biblical literacy do not need to be taught or experienced in the same way as past generations.

"

...to create an intervention that would address the decline of Biblical application among Christian millennials.

CASE STUDY #2

The Christ & Coffee Facebook Page

The following case study was initiated by Haid Kherlopian under the guidance of advisors Dr. Frank Chan and Dr. Derek W. Taylor. The study was presented in 2019 as a dissertation for partial fulfillment of a Doctor of Ministry Degree. The motivation behind the study was to create an intervention that would address the decline of Biblical application among Christian millennials. The researcher used the Facebook social media platform as a mode to present biblical themed videos to fifty participants. He wanted to see whether watching these videos online would increase their desire to apply these principles to their daily lives.

Kherlopian's study began by creating a Facebook page that hosted short videos called "Christ and Coffee" that focused on biblical principles. He then created a "Christ and Coffee Viewer Survey" or CCVS and invited the 342 "likers" of his page to fill it out. Of the 70 that completed the survey, 50 were chosen on the following criteria: 19-34 years of age; and they have watched at least two episodes of Christ and Coffee. A large percentage of those participating attended church once a month, but only about a third interacted with the Bible on a daily basis (Kherlopian 69).

The researcher posted 11 videos on the Facebook platform that fitted under two different categories. The first category was a sermonette in which he taught about a biblical idea or principle. The second

category he called a listing which covered facts about scripture that was built around a common theme. A video called God or Money? (God or Money) Is an example of a sermonette in which he discussed the verse in Matthew 6:24 in which Jesus states that man cannot serve two masters. The takeaway from the video was that all things belong to God and that it is up to man to determine how to use the resources, whether for good or bad. In terms of a listing video, Kherlopian created one describing the top five deaths in scripture (The Top Five Fatalities in the Bible). The video mimicked the video game series Mortal Kombat, specifically the end scene where the narrator cries out "Finish him!" before the winner defeats their opponent. He then recreated the following fatalities: David beheading Goliath; Jael stabbing a tent peg through Sisera's temple; Jezebel being thrown off a balcony and then eaten by dogs; Eutychus falling asleep during a sermon, then falling to his death out of a window; and number one was Jesus on the cross, defeating Satan, sin and death. The video included a lesson on "how Jesus came to end the cycles of violence and calls us to live a nonviolent lifestyle" (Kherlopian 72).

The participants were then asked to complete a survey to determine a Living the Word Improvement Score. The responses to the questions were based on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The data that was gathered covered six different categories: Abide in Christ, Live the Word, Pray in Faith, Fellowship with Believers, Witness to the World, and Minister to Others.

> **"**
> **...virtual evangelism through social media could have an impact on increasing a person's desire to follow the tenets of Christianity.**

Challenges the researcher faced in this study were that the findings were heavily skewed to viewers that attended church regularly. The population was predominantly Armenian, so the results of the study did not address "improving Living the Word among both unchurched and non-Armenian millennials" (Kherlopian 71). The study, also, did not offer a mode of researching whether the participants applied these principles to their daily lives.

The outcome of the study showed that there was an improvement in the participant's "Living the Word Improvement score" after watching the videos on Facebook. According to his data, 48 of the 50 who participated had an increase in their score. This indicated that they wished to apply the principles to their lives, but there was no way in determining whether they went through with it or not.

Although the study focused on Armenian, Christian millennials it showed that virtual evangelism through social media could have an impact on increasing a person's desire to follow the tenets of Christianity. The study does not focus on game-play as a method of instruction, but the communal setting of Facebook does show that millennials are interested in participating in different community-based ways in order to grow spiritually. The videos also made connections to real world situations and implications that correlate directly to the Bible. This seems to be a powerful way of showing that Bible stories are interconnected with everyday life providing biblical relevancy to the generation. Millennials are also greatly impacted by the power of visuals over text which is one of the reasons the written word is losing relevance.

CASE STUDY #3

Role-Playing and Religion: Using Games to Educate Millennials

The following case study was initiated by Adam L. Porter at Illinois College in an effort to teach millennial college students about religion and theology. Porter experimented with role-playing games in his religion classes finding positive responses from his students to his pedagogical approach. His motivation was to verify why these games resulted positively among this generation of student. He was also interested in seeing whether these games encouraged empathy towards opposing viewpoints.

Adam was first introduced to role-playing games in the classroom when he was in high school by Mr. Biedron. His teacher taught Russian history and played the role of the tsar while the students became nobles, serfs, and other member of the community. Halfway through the semester, a revolution was sparked, and the roles changed to fit similar historical changes that occurred. The students were expected to know their roles and act accordingly, defending their stances based on what they learned. Porter attended a conference presentation by Gary Yamasaki in which he was introduced to the "Acts Game" which was created to improve student engagement in a class on the Book of Acts (Yamasaki).

As mentioned earlier in the *Summary of Findings* of this thesis*,* Porter applied this same pedagogical approach to his own New Testament

> **"**
> ## *The community aspect must be of key importance.*

class. Students took on the roles of Pharisee, Sadducees, Romans, Zealots, Essenes or Christians and were expected to read Theissen's Shadow of the Galilean (1987) to understand the society of that time period and the different sects of first century Judea, as well as other historical authors. As his role-playing experiment took shape, he noticed that the students empathized with the characters they were give and began relating to the historical events of that time with a different perspective. The process seemed to have increased engagement and taught the students to think critically about scripture while learning about first century Judea.

The main challenge faced during this study was in creating the game from the ground up. Porter had several resources to build from, but he did have to adjust things to fit his class.

The results of his study showed although the motivation behind role-playing games connects with many generations, it seems to resonate well with what we know about millennials and their culture. Millennials have been raised on games, both digital and analog. They are used to competition but are also a very community focused group whether online or in person. In terms of learning, millennials want to have a practical and pragmatic approach to learning content. The thought of learning for learning's sake does not sit well with them.

Considering the traits of millennials and their affinity towards games, this study shows that a similar approach can be used in order to increase biblical literacy among them. This case may have been conducted in a classroom setting, but there is no reason why something similar could be used in a digital space. The community aspect must

be of key importance. Plenty of games capitalize on this such as Everquest or World of Warcraft. If role-playing can increase interest and independent thinking in a class on the New Testament, then it is obvious that something similar could be used for a general biblical studies approach or broken down in sections by biblical principles or time periods.

CASE STUDY CONCLUSION

The three case studies presented are evidence that the basic tenets of Christianity and Biblical literacy can be taught through a game-like, digital interface. By creating an intentional space for open communication and study, while appealing to the passions of game-play, these studies are great examples of modern solutions to faith learning. The interaction between users, whether digitally as in the Minecraft game or Facebook page or personally, as in Porter's role-playing game, seems to be the key that drives each of these solutions. Based on these studies there is strong evidence that an interactive or team-based, online game based on scripture with a strong community dynamic could make a strong impact on addressing the issues of Biblical illiteracy among the millennial generation.

VISUAL ANALYSES

VISUAL ANALYSIS #1

The Alabaster Bible Series

This selection depicts two books of the Bible as designed by Alabaster. Bryan Ye-Chung and Brian Chung are co-founders of this company which started in 2016. The 66 books of the Bibles have been divided up in sections and redesigned to attract a newer audience.

The audience in mind is the millennial generation who according to research are impacted more by the power of visuals over text (James). The traditional layout and design of the Bible is heavy on text leaving millennials without a desire to read it. An overall appreciation for traditional literature has declined among millennials , part of which is due to a desire to take things in small doses. Millennials seem to have a strong affinity to a minimal design structure with curated imagery (Lau) and are less likely to read or trust the Bible of older generations simply based on aesthetics ("Interview with Alabaster Co."). This Bible is meant to be displayed like a magazine or coffee table book instead of tucked away in a bookshelf or nightstand drawer like most traditional Bibles. There may have been a time when a family Bible was displayed proudly, but an appreciation for it as ornamentation has diminished since the 1900s.

This design update is meant to fit the aesthetics of the millennial generation. Emphasis is placed on the quality of its visual packaging as well as providing a clear representation of the content within. This is a re-brand of what the world understands as the Bible. Great strides have been taken to separate this new design from what is traditionally

Figure 01

Figure 02

Figure 03

Figure 04

viewed as Bible design.

The front cover of each book is white contrasting the traditionally black covers of older Bibles. The design is simple and clean with a minimalist flair. Each cover has a simple title that is centered in the top section. The title is set in a modern typestyle with a slight underline directly below. Each book has a different square-shaped image that fills up about 2/3 of the bottom section. The images used are moody photographs without a clear connection to the title or the contents within. The images seem to create a vibe more than represent what is within. They are reminiscent of an Instagram feed. There are no Christian symbols or icons to guide the viewer into recognizing what this book is about except for the title.

The spread depicted is also minimalistic in style. It consists of a single column of text that seems to be locked into the center column of a three-column layout. The chapter number stands above the text in a larger type size. The right side of the spread is filled with another mood creating image. It is difficult to say if there is a direct correlation between the image and text, but it appears that aesthetics are the primary reasons for image selection. Due to the text being locked into the center of the left spread, there is plenty of white space allowing for notes if one was willing to write in it. Although there is space for it, the beauty of the layout would probably stop a reader from jotting down any notes.

This Bible appears to more decorative than something to study. The layout and composition are beautiful like an artsy coffee table book, but because of the design one would be hesitant to use it for study or

deeper reading. The design seems to define millennials as being more concerned with how the Bible looks than what you can learn from it.

These design choices help me understand what millennials are interested in terms of aesthetics. They prefer minimalist design with interesting visuals and small amounts of text (James). It is apparent that they would prefer to not be overwhelmed with large amounts of text like in traditional Bibles. If my goal is to create a game of sorts to increase biblical literacy, then I need to consider these aesthetic choices - clean layouts and brief, but impactful verbiage.

VISUAL ANALYSIS #2

David vs Goliath Bible Game

This selection depicts a pair of screen shots from a mobile device game created by Righteous Tales. The game is called David vs Goliath – Bible Story. The premise of the game is to prepare David for his epic battle against Goliath of the Philistines while learning about the Bible through various mini games and challenges. The target audience of this game is for children 9 years-old or older who are interested in playing the role of King David from the Bible. This game is aimed at a younger target audience than what my research is focusing on, but conceptually it fits right in. This is a mobile device game that can be played on phones or tablets. It is free for purchase and consists of dozens of immersive story chapters that include over 100 achievements and 7 mini games.

Visually, the game is aimed at a younger audience. It has a western style of illustration that reminds me of the Disney movie Hercules to a degree. It consists of great animation and storylines. The voice acting is on par with many animated cartoons. It combines touch and tilt style game play keeping things interesting as you move along. The scenes are well illustrated and composed. There are plenty of icons and symbols throughout the game that connect directly to the story of David. Imagery like a shepherd's staff, a sling and stone, and sheep all help feed the story. The imagery is key in helping the player understand what is going on and who is involved. There is a bit of humor thrown in, as well.

The strongest aspect of the game is the story telling. The game does
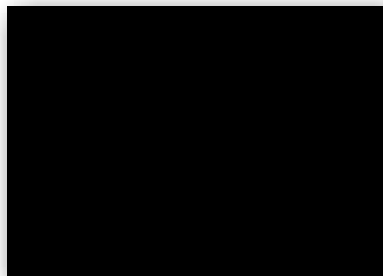
Figure 05

Figure 06
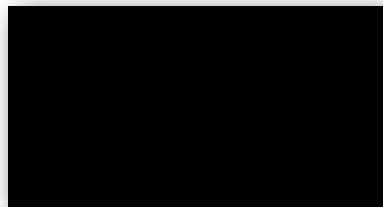
Figure 07
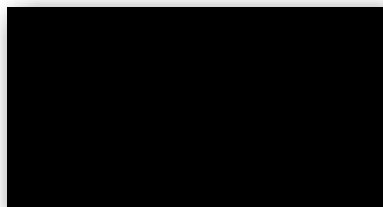
Figure #08
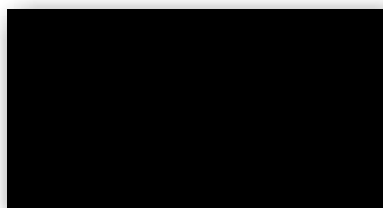
Figure #09

a great job in retelling the story of David and maintaining biblical accuracy. As you travel though the game you can click on various people and parts of the scenery and learn more about what is going on. Each of the mini games help you learn more about David and, in turn, help you prepare for facing Goliath. Another bonus is that you can control the difficulty level so that the game is challenging for many different ages.

This approach can be a direct influence with where I am headed with in terms of my visual solution. The game reaches millennials through its multiple achievement levels. Millennials, being raised on games, thrive on level ups and achievements. This game does a good job of keeping them interested this way. This game focuses only on David and Goliath instead of the entirety of the Bible. Similarly to the Alabaster Bible, this game breaks down the entire Bible into smaller chunks making it easier to swallow.

When I consider my own visual solution, I can see a blend of the Alabaster Bible and this game. The game play, storylines, and emphasis on telling a Biblically accurate story are important things from this game that I would draw from. However, my target audience is older than the target for this game, so the visuals will be different. This game also seems to lack the community portion that is so important to millennials. I assume there are ways to share information, but to reach millennials it is going to need some type of multi-player or community-based connection. Whether that is done through an in-game chat room or by sharing out through social media, it has been evident that adult millennials would like that in this type of game. Considering the traits and affinity toward games, especially role-playing games,

this approach could be used to increase biblical literacy. Millennials would be entertained and challenged while learning more and more about the Bible.
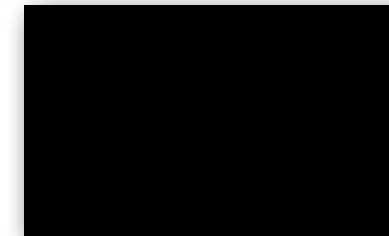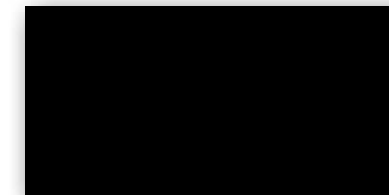

Figure #10

Figure #11

Figure #12

VISUAL ANALYSIS #3

YouVersion Bible App

The following visual artifact is the interface for the YouVersion Bible App. This screenshot shows the various tabs or sections of the app including the read, listen, user interaction, and community sections. This app is geared toward anyone who would like to study the Bible on their mobile device. Judging by the use of flat design, the minimal interface, the multiple modes of interaction with scripture and the emphasis of community, I would say that millennials would be on their specific target list. Users would access this app through their mobile devices, including tablets. The screenshot shows the app being used on an iOS device, but the app has been developed to work on Android and online at Bible.com. Once installed on the device of their choice, users can access the Bible directly by reading it or through audio format. The app has also been ported to work with Google Home or Amazon Echo devices for a full audio experience.

Visually, the interface seems a little text heavy, but the use of white space and light, sans serif typestyle maintain a clean look overall. The majority of the interface is text driven because the Bible is text driven, but images are included in the forms of avatars and various posts provided by YouVersion or other users. The UX is simple. The top menu gives you notifications and other user specific options. There is a tab of flat design icons across the bottom of the app and the majority of the app relies on up/down scrolling.

The content included in the app is Bible focused. The home tab works as a quick dashboard that can show a summary of your community

feed or a personal rundown of options that are hidden in your profile. Bible plans, badge counts, and verse of the days tend to reside there. The Read (now Bible) tab takes you to the scripture where you can choose which version you would like to read. Because this is an internet-based app you have access to many different versions without having to buy them. There are many versions that can be downloaded for offline use and several that have an audio format to them so you can listen to the word as you read. Under plans you can choose various Bible reading plans from various sources. Some are short 3-5 day studies and others can go up to 365 days. The Me tab has changed to a Discover tab where you can find other users to interact with or churches to attend and connect with their sermons.

YouVersion has done a fantastic job in providing the Bible in a way that would appeal to millennials. The interface is clean and minimalistic considering the text heaviness of the Bible. The user interface is intuitive and does not require much training, if any. The flat icons are easy to identify and understand. One of the biggest strengths that this Bible app has is its community interconnectivity. The app allows you connect with friends, share verses and comment on the verses. The app seems to primarily focus on the Bible reading portion, but the community section is well done. So much so, that virtual Bible studies could be done through the app. In fact, a user can select a Bible plan from the list and invite another member to study along. This is a great way to create a closer community and study the Bible together virtually.

In terms of my own visual solution, I can see where drawing from the community forum of this app would be beneficial. The joint Bible study would be a great way to dig deeper with other believers, too. One thing that I noticed that I had no idea it had was a badges section. The app will document how often you interact with the Bible and other users giving you various badges as you go. These badges are rewards to encourage users to keep going. These are the types of motivations that encourage millennials to stay on target. I can see where simple badges like this could work with my visual solution, as well.

CONCLUSION

After conducting this research, it has become clear that culture has become one of the biggest stumbling blocks between millennials and biblical interaction. The case studies, however, revealed that the culture does not need to be changed, but can be used in order to encourage a re-connection between millennial Christians and the Bible and this should, theoretically, lead to an increase in biblical literacy.

The impact of social media and the simplification of information through the internet into palatable "sound bites" along with the "secular and cultural ideologies on being nice, blended with softened tenets of Christianity has weakened doctrine" (Doberenz) to the point Christians are less confident in what they believe and less willing to express themselves as defenders of their faith, especially among millennials. This current culture has also created a great distrust among millennials towards the organized church driving many of them to search for truth in other ways, especially within the digital sphere. The impact of global communities and communication provided by the internet has encouraged this generation to believe that all knowledge should never come from a single source of reference, but should be derived

from multiple sources, including interactive dialogue, whether online or in-person, but preferably online.

Although the research shows that a combination of technology and culture seems to be driving Christians away from the Bible, it is also evident that these same causes can be used to re-introduce the Bible and its deep, theological roots to a generation of Christians struggling to know what they truly believe.

My initial goal of this project was to determine whether biblical literacy was lessening among millennial Christians and what effects this is having on their faith. What I found was that there is a decrease in biblical interaction among self-professed Christians and that this disengagement has helped minimize a deep Christian theology into simple quips and sayings leading a generation to not fully understand what they believe in and denies them the tools needed to accurately defend a faith they claim. Through the research and the case studies, it became clear that in order to reach the millennial generation and reverse this disengagement, the church needs to step down from the high and mighty pulpit and meet millennials where they are. Online.

In order to do so, the church should recognize four essentials about this generation that could help increase engagement. First, millennials spend a lot of time and energy on digital platforms. The majority of their daily interactions exists online, whether behind a computer or on a mobile platform. Secondly, games and competitive play are important to them as 70% of them play mobile games every day (Perik). Interactions with Scripture can not be text heavy since any "appreciation for literature in general has declined among millennials"

(Kherlopian). A full page of text, presented in a classical manner is daunting and unappealing to a generation accustomed to 280 character tweets. Finally, although this generation seems to exist in an isolated state online, strong, interactive communities are very important to millennials. They may prefer virtual interactions to physical ones, but the preference is also with real people. The difference being location.

It has become obvious that they thrive on competition and have found ways of creating deep and personal communal ties online through online forums, social media, and gaming. The data acquired through this study has helped me form a visual solution that can be used to create a method of connecting millennial Christians to the Bible and by doing so gain sound doctrine and develop a community of support based on Christian foundations. In the end, it seems that biblical literacy can be increased among millennial Christians by engaging them with the Bible in ways that they are already drawn to and participating in.

3
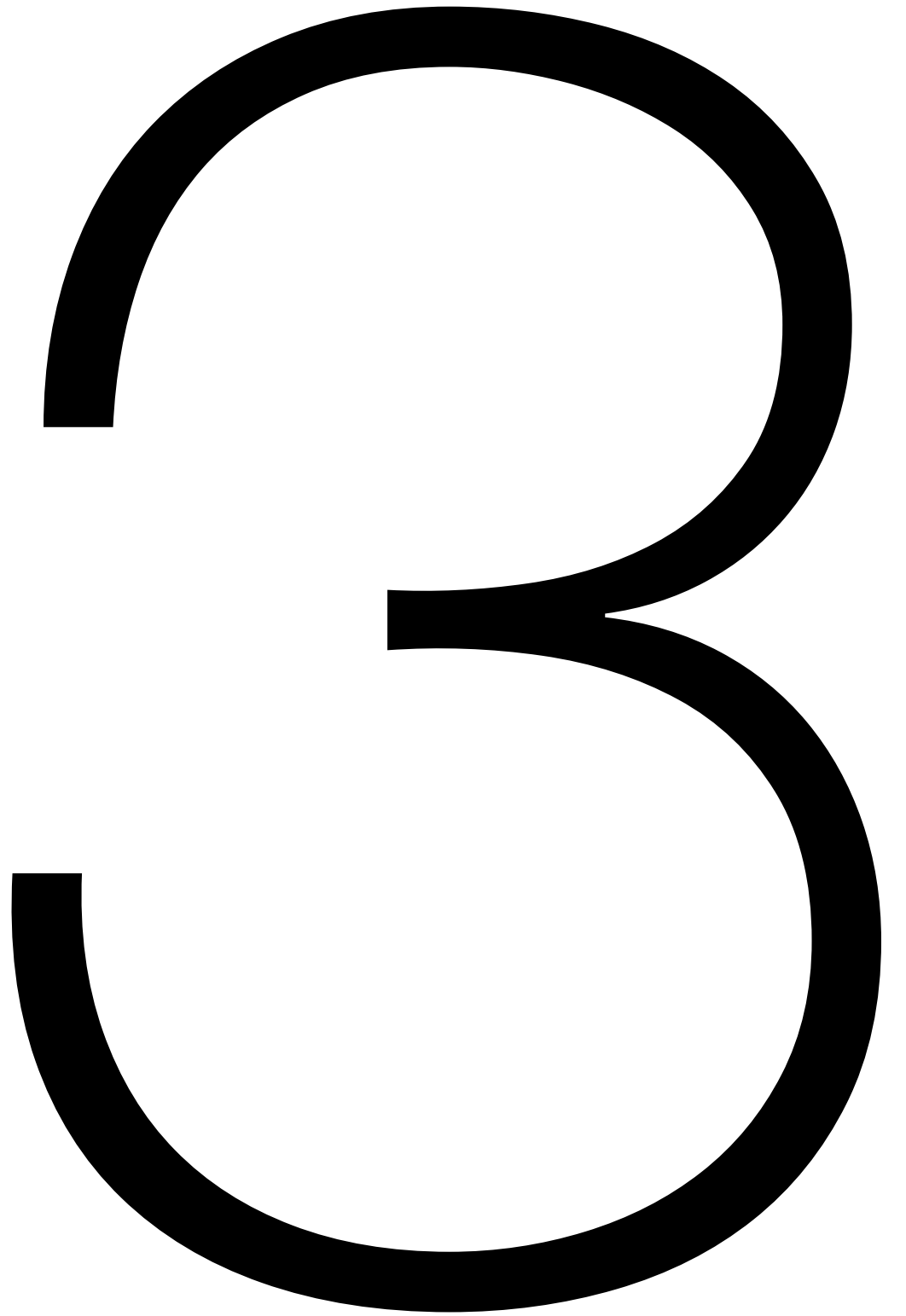
CHAPTER
VISUAL PROCESS

DESIGN BRIEF

Project Title

The Way: A Mobile App Game for Seekers of Truth

The first step of my visual process was to define the design problem. After completing the research and creating the Thesis, I defined the issue that I felt needed to be addressed.

Design Problem

Christian doctrine is based on the tenets of the Bible, but studies show that millennial Christians are becoming less apt to interact or study the Bible in its traditional format (Fulks). This distancing from the Bible has the potential of causing what has historically been known as solid, biblical doctrine to become lost out of simply not knowing what lies within the pages of scripture. Without purposeful interaction with the Bible, followers of the faith are losing sight of the sacred traditions that form the foundation of Christianity rendering the Bible to possibly become nothing more than a "moldy old book and a bad memory (Reed 154).

"
...they simply do not want to interact with the scriptures in the same manner as generations before them (Carlson)

The fundamental problem is not that millennials are no longer desiring the truths that are expressed in the Bible, but they simply do not want to interact with the scriptures in the same manner as generations before them (Carlson). There is a general distrust of the traditional way of doing things and a desire to seek truth by seeking multiple sources instead of a single person, like a pastor, teacher, or parent (Bauman). Millennials, as digital natives, seek answers by embracing technology and online community over a Sunday sermon or face-to-face small group.

In order to draw millennials closer to the Bible, I plan on meet them where they are by providing them with an opportunity to interact with scripture while following the following criteria.

- Millennials prefer a digital platform (Bauman).
- Games and competitive play are important (Porter).
- The Bible should be presented in a format that is not text heavy. (Kherlopian).
- A strong, interactive community is important for discussion and support (McMullen).

Target Audience

In order to better understand the needs of my target audience, I chose to create a persona instead of using a list of descriptors.. A persona is a fictitious person that represents the target user of a product, service, or in this instance, a game. Personas tend to summarize the target audiences background, interests, and needs in a way that is more personal and relatable. Creating a persona also helps in developing empathy for the target audience during the creative process.

Persona

Name: Grace Seeker

Age: 29

Background: Grace Seeker is a 29-year-old millennial Christian. Growing up in a conservative Christian family, she was introduced to the Bible from a young age and attended Sunday school regularly. However, as she entered her teenage years, Grace found herself drawn to the world of role-playing games (RPGs), video games, and online communities. Like most millennials, "social media, constant connectivity and on-demand entertainment and communication" (Dimcok) were modernizations she grew up with. These interests and the influence of secular culture and society gradually led her to explore new perspectives on spirituality and faith.

Interests: *Role-Playing Games (RPGs)* - Grace loves immersing herself in the intricate worlds of RPGs. She's fascinated by the storytelling, character development, and decision-making aspects of these games.

Figure #13

The ability to create and mold her own characters resonates with her desire for personal growth and exploration. This fascination with RPG's is shared with her peers as this genre of gaming is second among millennials just below puzzle/match-3 games (Perik).

Video Games - Beyond RPGs, Grace enjoys a variety of video games, from action-adventure titles to simulation games. She appreciates the creative and artistic aspects of game design and often finds inspiration in the virtual landscapes she explores. 70% of millennials, like her, play mobile games every day (Kaser). While she does enjoy gaming on consoles, her preference is to play on her smartphone, as do 90% of her generation (Perik).

Online Community - Grace is an active member of various online communities. She's part of forums, Discord servers, and social media groups where she connects with like-minded individuals. Much like Michael McMullen's Minecraft community and her generational peers, Grace prefers to socialize with others online more than through physical interactions (Motta).These digital spaces provide her with a sense of belonging and a platform to discuss both gaming and matters of faith. Her first step in research is always through online sources where she can "communicate, understand, learn, find, and do many things" (Bauman 303).

Spiritual Journey: While Grace has distanced herself from the traditional study of the Bible, her spiritual journey has not been stagnant. She seeks to integrate her love for RPGs and video games into her exploration of faith. For her, the narratives in these games often echo universal themes of heroism, redemption, and the struggle

between good and evil. She believes that these stories can be as spiritually enlightening as the biblical tales she grew up with and require

Relationship with Religion: Grace's relationship with her religious upbringing is complex. While she no longer adheres strictly to the doctrines she was taught, she maintains a sense of connection to her faith. Her lack of affiliation with a specific denomination is a result of feeling that churches, as organizations, are too focused on rules, money, and power (Chase). Despite her choice to not join a specific church, she still believes in God, has a sense of being spiritual, and prays when she feels it is necessary. Like many of her generation, she believes that her journey is unique and that her faith is personal and can be expressed in diverse ways.

Proposed Outcome

Considering millennials' affinity to video games and community, I feel that the best method of meeting them where they are is to create a mobile game that meets the criteria listed within the Design Problem.

The purpose of this mobile video game is to increase Biblical literacy among millennial Christians by meeting them where they are - online as a community of gamers. Surveys show that 40% of millennials claim to socialize more through video games than in physical interactions (Motta). This opens up an opportunity to create a strong faith-based community through modalities they are already accustomed to. The reasons I am focusing on a mobile game is because 9 out of 10 millennials prefer mobile gaming (Perik) and the platform lends itself

to being within reach and accessible at any time or place. In fact, millennials spend 3.7 hours on their mobile phones each day and their favorite activities are mobile gaming, social media and communication (Perik). In terms of gaming, RPG or Role-Playing Games are some of the most popular.

The mobile game solution will meet the four criteria in the following ways. It is a game that provides content in a digital platform. It is an exploratory game with educational aspects within, but still a game at its core. The Bible will be an integral part of the game-play, but it will be delivered in smaller, relatable chunks instead of the traditional text heavy format. There will also be additional resources that connect with the scriptures presented in order for the user to gain historical and contextual information to gain a better understanding of the verses presented. Finally, the social aspect within the game will be an equally important part of the overall experience as it plays a vital role within both the millennial and Christian cultures.

> **" Surveys show that 40% of millennials claim to socialize more through video games than in physical interactions (Motta).**

Title: The title of the game will be "The Way". I chose this title because the early church was called "The Way" as shown in Acts 24:14 "However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect..." The title not only connects to the early church, but also describes a voyage or path one takes. It focuses on the journey instead of an end result. The game is exploratory in nature, so the title is fitting.

Design Considerations: The interface of the app will be minimalistic in design, embracing a less is more style that is often defined as clean. "Millennials like things clean and simple" (DeSantis). They are interested in interfaces that are simplified and to the point. Much of this is driven by the fact that they exist in an "internet dominated, tech savvy world that requires a constant upkeep" (Lau) and rather than drown in the bombardment of information they lean towards simple and minimal aesthetics.

In terms of color, millennials tend to prefer softer and organic color palettes. This is driven by the fact that they value a look that is unique and authentic. They prefer a distinctive look, but not too attention-seeking (DeSantis). Since the scenes of the game are set in first century Israel, the color choices will be primarily driven by the desert environment and retain a softness that appeals to this generation.

The typography will be a blend of a unique calligraphic typeface with a sans serif complement to ease readability. Millennials seem to prefer typography that Peter Saville calls "modern utility" or in other words, typefaces that are easily reproducible on a gabardine jacket or on screen (Walker). But they also are interested in "unique handmade fonts" that help create original, personalized experiences (Lau). I plan on blending both trends by creating a unique script that partners well with a classic sans serif font that will appeal to millennials.

The overall aesthetic will be similar to what is used by the Alabaster

> ## "
> *They prefer a distinctive look, but not too attention-seeking (DeSantis)*

Bibles and YouVersions Bible app with plenty of space and a typographic treatment that "supports the penchant for clean lines that's a key part of the millennial aesthetic" (DeSantis).

Game Play Considerations: The Way will be set up as a multi player adventure game. Millennials seem to prefer multiplayer since the game becomes more of a community based adventure instead of something they are stuck doing by themselves. Part of the drive for many millennials who play these games is because it allows them to become a part of the story, instead of simply watching it with 50% believing that these "online experiences were 'meaningful replacements' for in-person experiences (Motta).

In an effort to provide a unique experience or surprise with each play, the game will use a game map that will change randomly from game to game. This should help avoid boredom with the game as each session will provide a different experience and storyline. Millennials seem to prefer unpredictable outcomes in their game play (Strick).

This game will also provide opportunities for players to learn historical and biblical knowledge through puzzles and quizzes. The higher the player scores the better equipped they are to face new adventures. Memory verses will be included as methods of leveling up, as well.

As mentioned in the thesis, millennials are one of the most diverse populations the United States has experienced (Dimock) and the concept of a global perspective is not new to them. In fact, they seem to love exploration of new locations and different cultures. Besides the primary goal of increasing interactivity with the scriptures, the game

will attempt to improve or test knowledge of first century Israel and Rome. This will be done by incorporating content that is historically accurate and develops context to better understand the scripture each player comes in contact with.

Though monetization is not a key part of this visual solution, most top-earning games do so from their social features (Motta). It makes sense to incorporate these in this game as it could lend itself to create community or possibly a form of discipleship. This community aspect will be an important part of the game. The more they interact with each other through game play, gifting in-game items, verse sharing or simple dialogue, the easier it will be to level up and move forward. The game will also include a simple group chat feature with conversation threading in order to create a strong interactive community among teams and other players.

Deliverables

This mobile game is in the conceptual phase and will be presented as such. The following deliverables will be created to help pitch the concept to perspective backers and game designers for further production.

Game Concept: The concept will be presented as a written summary describing the storyline, goals, and mechanics behind the game play. It will describe how the user interacts with the game and their team members. The concept will cover how users interact with maps and event cards and how they can increase the users attributes in the areas of Head, Heart, and Hands.

The concept will also include the characters that a user can choose to play as. These will be based on New Testament characters of the Bible. They may include fishermen, tent makers, tax collectors, followers of John the Baptist, Pharisees, Sadducees, Greeks, and others.

Along with the basic game play, the concept will describe the community or social components of the game that can be used, not just for game specific reasons, but for relationship building, discipleship, Bible study, and evangelism.

Brand Guide: A basic brand guide will be developed. This guide will include logos and their usage, typographical choices, and a color palette to help guide the overall "look" of the game. The purpose of the Brand Guide is to define the aesthetic choices of the game and any aspects pertaining to the game. This may include marketing tools, web page development, and social media usage.

Game Layout: A basic layout of the game will be illustrated based on the Brand Guide and presented as a digital mockup The layout will help describe the Game Concept in a visual format. The Game Layout may include game-play options, characters, and social interactivity within the game. The purpose is to create a visual representation of what the finished product may look and feel like.

Mood Board

Image boards or "mood boards" are a collection of photographs, illustrations, or other visual assets that are used to visually describe a distinct style. Once I created a design brief, determined my target audience, and decided upon my final deliverables I searched for imagery or design assets that would inspire and create a visual direction for my visual solution (Figure #14). These images would help guide the visual language of my solution.

The overall concept is to create a role-playing game or RPG based on first century Israel, so I searched for images that spoke to that end goal. Some of the images included in this mood board are from Christian themed RPG games including "Holy Lands RPG" and "The Guardians of David". I included screen shots from their game and character sheets that could be a good references for what I end up conceptualizing.

I also included various fonts that I thought might be successful based on the Design Considerations from my Proposed Outcomes. These were chosen as I felt they connected with Roman style lettering.

There are also minimalist illustrations that I felt fell in line with the millennial aesthetics mentioned in the Design Considerations, as well. They have soft, muted colors with a desert-like feel that should inspire the overall brand of the mobile game.

The Alabaster Bible series is included to remind me of the clean and simple design that relates well to the millennial generation according to the DeSantis article.
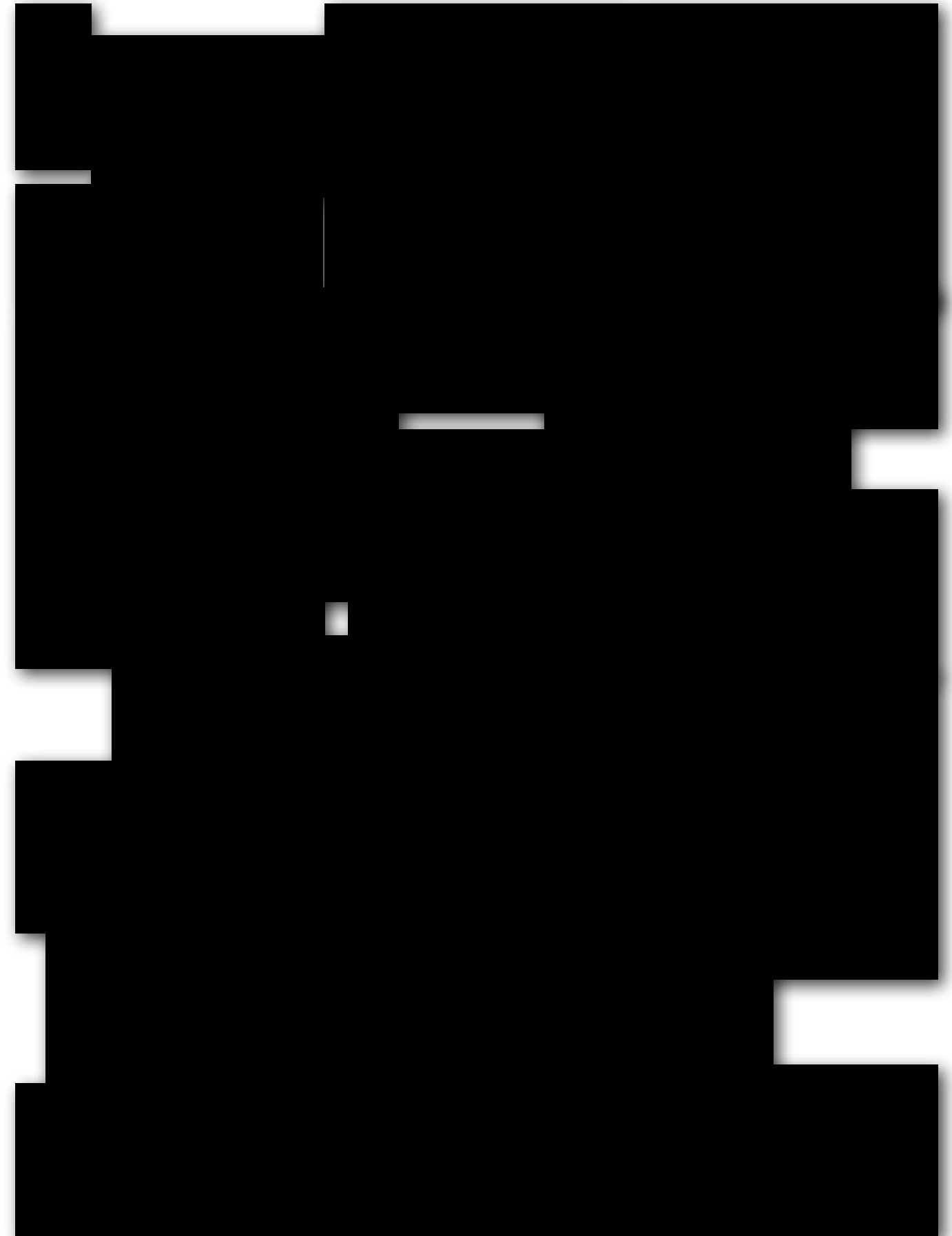
Figure #14

Color Palette

My color palette (Figure #15) is based on some of the imagery I collected in my mood board (Figure #14) from an adventure game called Journey developed by Thatgamecompany. Journey is set in a vast desert where the imagery is simplified and minimalistic in a way that I feel fits the millennial aesthetic according to my research. The imagery in the game is the driving force as the character encounters "a series of 'atmospheres' that the player would progress through" (Gordon). The game is as much experience as it is a series of actionable tasks and caters to the millennial need of simple interfaces that are straightforward and "aesthetically pleasing to interact with" (Lau).

The colors I chose create a soft and natural feel that not only appeal to the desert landscape of first century Israel, but also to the aesthetic choices of the target audience which Dru DeSantis describes as being "soft, approachable and authentic". Millennials gravitate towards colors that are unique , but not overly dramatic or attention-seeking (DeSantis).

The intent is for these colors to add a unique, aesthetic experience to the game that helps it stand apart from its competition. This color palette will also assist in creating a mood that blends historicity and faith while encouraging contemplation. The game is designed to follow the vibe shift that Lewis Gordon mentions in his article, similarly to Journey, whose core intent is to create an experience that is more honest.

PRIMARY COLORS

The Beige Way

C: 02 M: 08 Y: 30 K: 00

R: 249 G: 230 B: 186

Hex: F9E6BA

The Orange Way

C: 08 M: 37 Y: 76 K: 00

R: 232 G: 168 B: 086

Hex: E8A856

The Brown Way

C: 48 M: 63 Y: 63 K: 34

R: 107 G: 078 B: 071

Hex: 6B4E47

SECONDARY COLORS

The Blue Way

C: 48 M: 23 Y: 12 K: 00

R: 134 G: 171 B: 199

Hex: 86ABC7

The Green Way

C: 50 M: 21 Y: 35 K: 00

R: 134 G: 171 B: 166

Hex: 86ABA6

The Black Way

C: 00 M: 00 Y: 00 K: 100

R: 35 G: 31 B: 32

Hex: 231F20
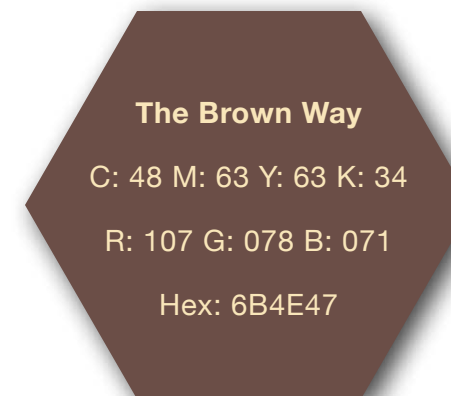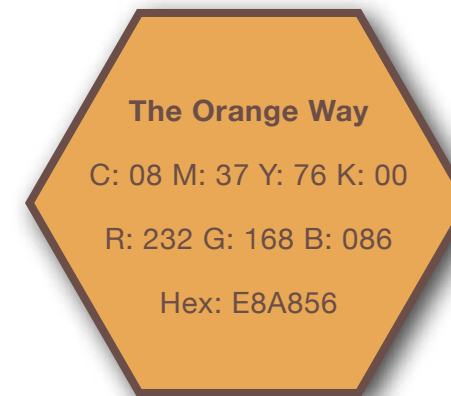
Figure #15

Brand Typography

I originally wanted to choose typefaces that I felt related closer to the chiseled lettering of the Roman Empire while maintaining the millennial generations affinity to simple and readable typography. I have always been drawn to Trajan Pro because it is an elegant typeface that works well as a display font (Figure #16). It was designed by Carol Twombly and Robert Slimbach in the late 1980s and was inspired by the classic Roman letterforms similar to the ones found at the base of the Trajan column (Trajan from Adobe Originals). It was not until receiving feedback on my progress that I found out how common Trajan was, especially in the genre of horror movie posters (Haubursin). This lead me back to the drawing board, or in this case the digital type case.

After watching an interview with graphic designer Yves Peters (How one...), I opted to create some stylized letterforms that I could use for the logo. Since most of the characters and the setting of the game is based in Israel, I changed direction and looked for type that was similar to a Hebrew script. I began with Jerusalem Font by Iconian Fonts (Figure #17) because I enjoyed the gestural strokes of its V and A. I used these two letterforms to create the final logomark. I did not have time to develop an entire typeface that would work for the game, so I chose HelveticaNeue as the core typestyle that would represent The Way's brand (Figure #18).

HelveticaNeue, as a type family, includes a variety of styles, but I chose to stick with Bold and Light. I recognize that this is a prolific typeface, as well, but it fits the millennial aesthetic of a simple and readable sans serif (DeSantis).
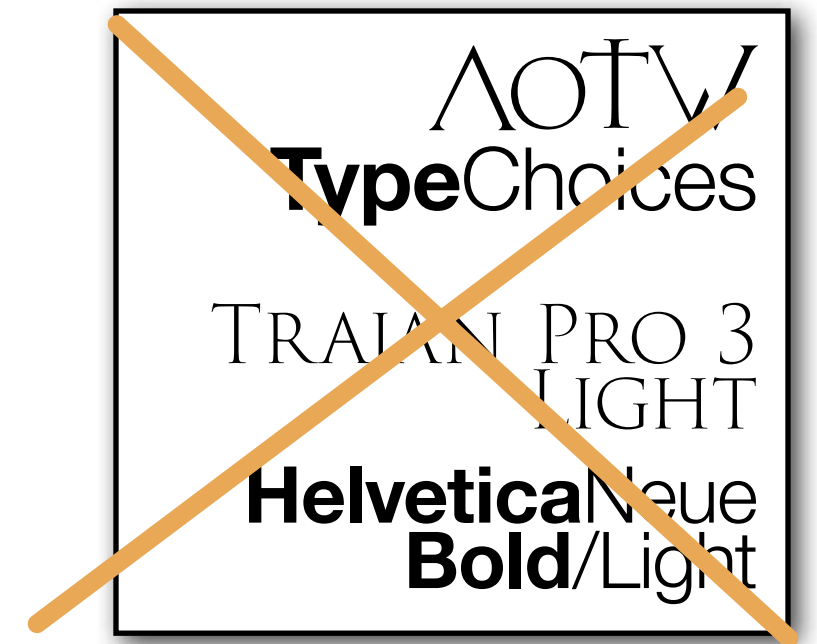
Figure #16
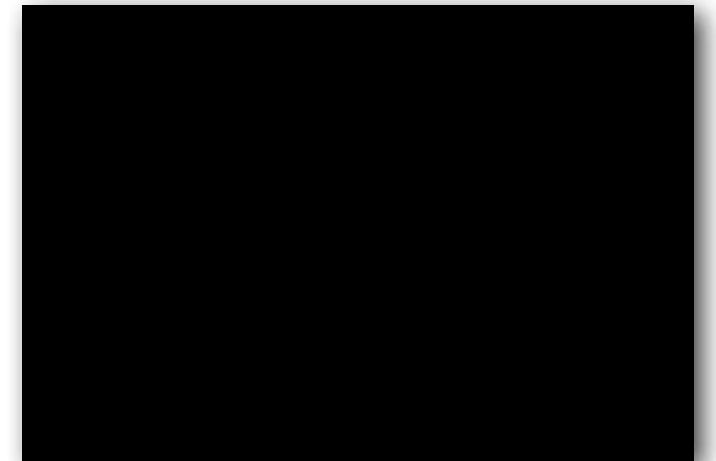
Figure #17
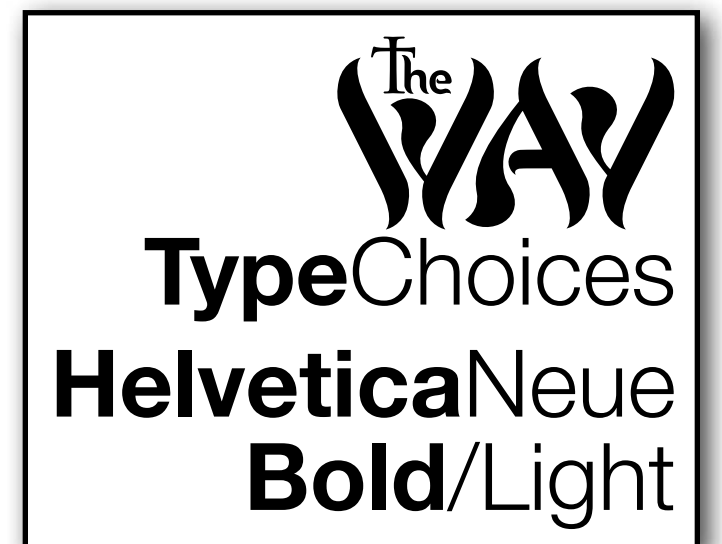
Figure #18

Design Process
Branding Thumbnails
and Rough Sketches

I began my visual solution by focusing on the logo part of the Brand Guide that I was to design. I drew up 20 quick thumbnails of a lettermark and 20 more of a wordmark (Figure 19) that I would then refine into 10 versions of each (Figure #20). I attempted to create lettering that was based on the chiseled lettering reminiscent of the Roman Empire. Considering the game takes place during the Roman Empire, I thought these letter-forms would make a great connection to the time period the game was set in.

Based on the role-playing games that were presented in the mood board, "Holy Lands" and "Five Guardians of David", these style of typography seemed to fit the aesthetic of these types of games, but I needed to maintain originality which is why I experimented with modified letter-forms instead of simply using the typefaces as they were. Millennials tend to prefer sans serif typefaces that are easily reproducible, but they also want design to further the experience without getting in the way. I wanted these logos to fit the millennial values of experiential individuality and creativity (Lau)

Originally, the name of the game was to be "Acts of The Way", so the lettermarks and wordmarks represented in these early stages focused on that title. It was not until the digitization or development of the logos that the tile was simplified down to "The Way". I felt that the original name was too long and complicated failing to meet the millennial aesthetic of being simple and to the point (DeSantis).
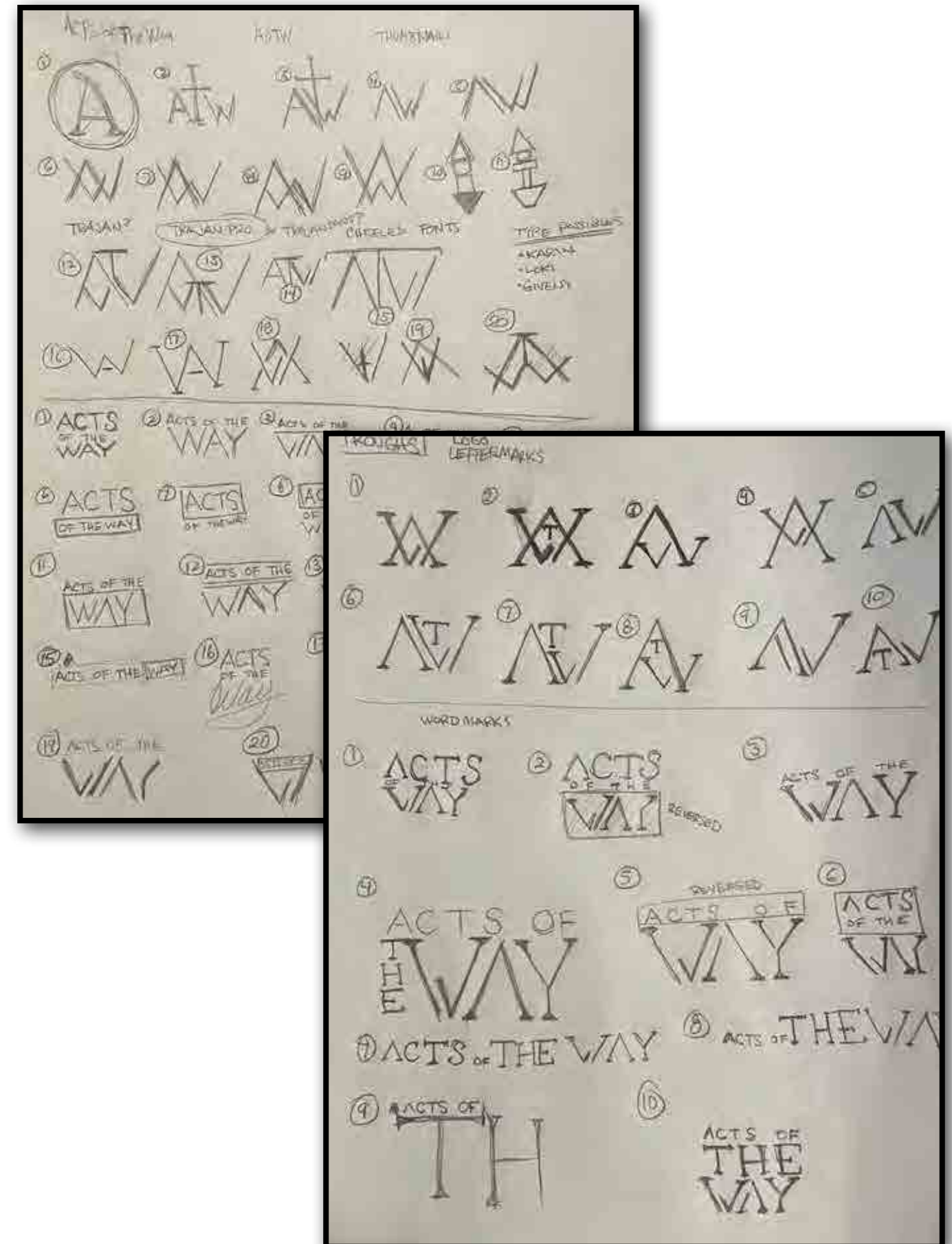
Figure #20

Initial Digital Roughs

Figure #21

Figure #22

Figure #23

Figure #24

Figure #25

Figure #26

Figure #27

Figure #28

Figure #29

Figure #30

Figure #31

Figure #32

Figure #33

Figure #34

Figure #35

Figure #36

Figure #37

Figure #38

Figure #39

Digital Roughs

The original digital roughs that I created (Figures #21 - #39) were based completely on my thumbnails and sketches (Figure #19, #20). I used Trajan Pro for my primary letterforms and modified the characters to fit the look created in the sketches. As I developed the letter and wordmarks, I came to the realizations that Trajan might not be the best typeface to use due to its overuse in the horror movie poster genre and that the "look" I was creating had more of a Roman Empire "feel" than something based in first century Judea. As mentioned earlier, it was during this part of the design process that I also went through a name change and simplified the title of the game from "Acts of The Way" to "The Way".

I researched the Hebrew alphabet and found several typefaces that attempted to emulate the calligraphic style of this form of script. However, I was not satisfied with the way many of the letterforms were designed in the Jerusalem typeface by Iconian Fonts (Figure #17). I felt like the "V" character was unique and chose to use the swashes it was created from to create the initial "W" (Figure #40-#41). After experimenting with different letterforms for the "A" and "Y", I came to realize that the same strokes that I used for the "W" could be used to define the "A" and "Y" for the wordmark (Figure #42 - #44).

I experimented with new variations for the letter "T" in the lettermarks using the Jerusalem typeface as inspiration, but I felt that the contrast of forms between the rigid shape of the "T" and the gestural feel of the "W" created a unique and compelling look. I also felt that the arm on the capital letter "T" made the character too dominant compared to the "W". With that in mind, I lowered the arm to create a lowercase

NEW Digital Roughs

Figure #40

Figure #41
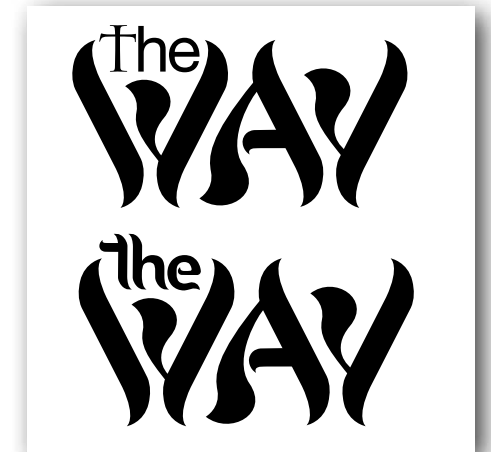
Figure #42

Figure #43
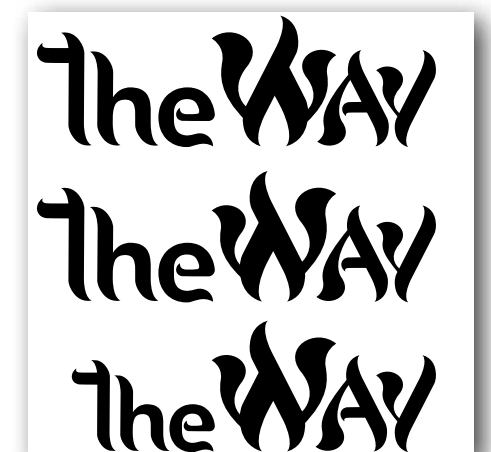
Figure #44

form of the "T". The reason I did not use Trajan's lowercase "t" is that the stem is curved and competes with the organic shape of the "W" I created (Figure #40, #41)

As I manipulated the letterforms through size, position, and relation to each other, I was struck by how these roughs created a visual connection to the crucifixion. This was unplanned until I began manipulating the letterforms in Adobe Illustrator. The lowered arm of the "T" creates an obvious cross, while the organic shape of the "W"'s bring about thoughts of a person with arms raised against the cross (Figure #39). Some of the variations seemed more spiritual or flame-like, but they all created an interesting interaction between the "T" and "W" (Figure #40).

After developing the lettermarks, I realized that I had not developed a way to incorporate the word "the" into the wordmark. I tried combining the modified "T" with Helvetica Neue (Figure #41), but realized that there was too much difference between them and the "WAY" letterforms. I then attempted to modify the letterforms to fit better which is how I got the stylized look of the word "the" in Figures #42 and #43. By editing the stems of the letterforms and giving them a slightly curved tail, the characters seemed to flow together a bit better. Once the forms were completed I applied various color variations from my color palette (Figure #15) until I was satisfied with the result.

I continued developing both the lettermark and wordmark until I was confident that I had created something that fit the aesthetic goals of the brand (Figure #45).

Figure #45

4

CHAPTER
FINAL SOLUTION

Deliverable #1
Game Concept

The Way – Mobile Video Game

You find yourself in 1st century Israel with a team of 3-5 individuals that you will go on an adventure of Biblical proportions with. Each of you will choose the role you will play in this game of exploration. You can be a beggar, fisherman, Pharisee, Sadducee, scribe, tax collector, or tent maker (Figure #47). It is possible for the team to consist of multiples of the same character type. Each of these characters will begin with a specific set of base attributes and gold coins that will determine how they are able to interact with the environment and other in-game characters. These attributes fall under three categories: Heart, Head, and Hand (Figure #49). The primary goal of the game is to defeat the oppositions of faith, whether it be skepticism, legalism, physical enemies of the faith, or even demons and the supernatural. The game begins in the village of Nazareth and will take you and your team throughout Israel, sometimes together and sometimes alone.

> **" You find yourself in 1st century Israel with a team of 3-5 individuals that you will go on an adventure of Biblical proportions with.**

The Way is an exploration of 1st century Israel in which the maps vary from game to game because they are multi-directional and built from cards that are pulled at random (Figure #48). Each card reveals more and more of the map until you are able to advance to the next level of the game. A team can not advance until the entire team has met the requirements for each level. Characters and locations will offer
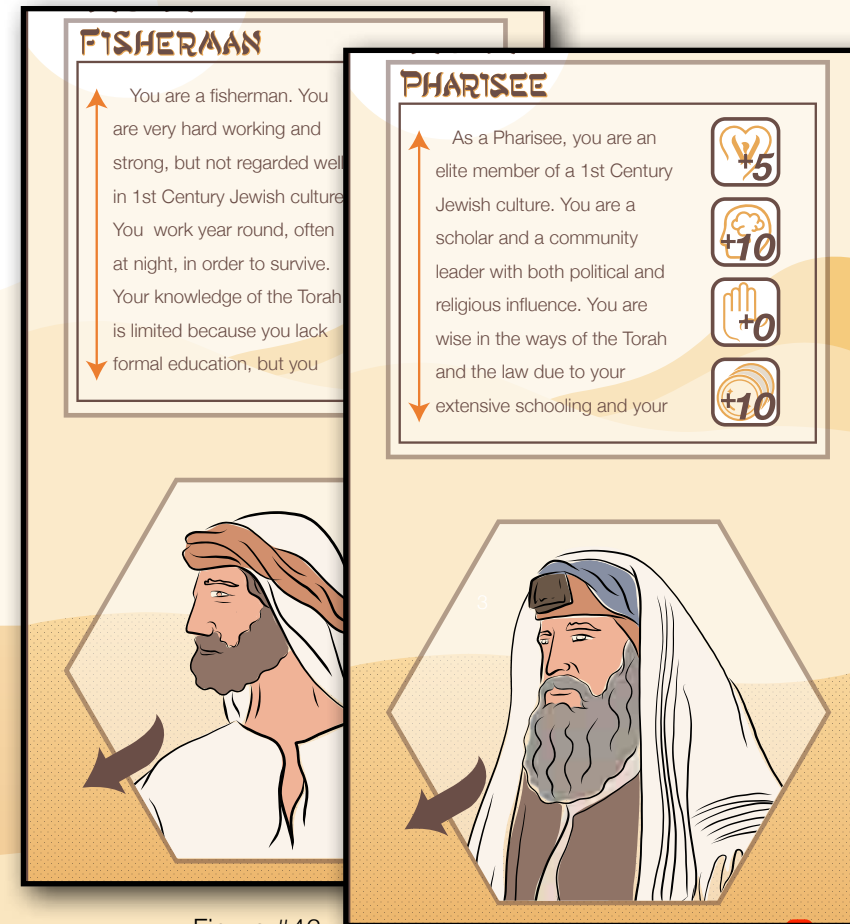
Figure #46

Figure #47

Figure #48

Heart Attributes

Head Attributes

Hand Attributes

Gold Coins

Figure #49

SITUATION

Your team has been welcomed into Galilee as guests to a local wedding. As you approach the location you are stopped by a poor beggar who appears to have leprosy. The cart he owns has lost a wheel and he pleads to you and your team for help.

EVENT - *Water Into Wine*

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine."

CHOOSE THE ATTRIBUTE YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECIEVE FOR WITNESSING THIS EVENT!

EVENT

You and your team have been invited to a wedding at a place called Cana in Galilee.

Figure #50

information that may or may not be useful in future decision making. The purpose of the map is not to describe a physical location, but to create encounters with in-game characters, historical events, and opportunities to develop stronger attributes. The events that are revealed follow the ministry of Jesus Christ and include historical and biblical background that might help in decisions made by the team as a whole or individuals when the team has gone in different directions. Examples of the events a user will encounter can be historical events of that time period, any of Jesus' miracles, His sermons, or His interactions with other characters from scripture (Figure #50). Experiencing these events can develop stronger attributes and may require the use of these while interacting with the events or people.

The attributes that each player earns throughout the game fall under the following three categories - Head, Heart, and Hands (Figure #49). The Head category refers to knowledge and wisdom gained though the various experiences and interactions. Heart reveals a strength in any of the fruits of the Spirit. These would be love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Hands refers to the physical side of the campaign and can range from strength to skills and abilities that could prove to be fruitful along the journey. The application of these attributes can be towards simple tasks like catching fish to fending off an enemy of the faith through words, compassion, or even action depending on the situation. Each interaction may reveal a different approach for success. Once an attribute is received it can never be taken away. These attributes will follow the character throughout the entire game.

Other ways to receive attributes is through side quests and mini

games (Figure #51). These will be biblical and historical puzzles based on experiences that the team or individual have had. The team can assist the individuals in these mini games. Memory verses will also be included as methods of receiving attributes in the Head category.

Leveling up will require the entire team reaching a prescribed number of attributes before moving forward. This should encourage each player to assist each other to do better and help maintain a team-based approach to the game. An individual does not beat the game, the team does.

Although the game is broken up by different levels, there are two main phases to complete in order to beat the game. The first phase of The Way focuses on the time period during Jesus' ministry. The players will all begin by experiencing Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and from there interact with different events that will lead up to His crucifixion. Since the game is built on randomization, the events may not happen in a linear timeline and the players may experience the same event multiple times, but each time with a different result or take away. The only events that will only happen once are Jesus' baptism and His crucifixion. This final event should lead the players into the second phase of The Way.

The second phase of The Way deals with the early church. The opening scene or interaction begins with Mary discovering

"
An individual does not beat the game, the team does.

the empty tomb. This phase is more about interacting with the various people of the New Testament. Again, the timeline is not linear and events can be experienced more than once. The end result is to receive the appropriate amount of attributes in order to complete the game.

This is a team-based game, so interaction with teammates is very important. It is possible for teams to go in different directions, so communication is imperative for success. The game has a threaded conversation chat feature that allows for constant interaction between players (Figure #52). The chat can be used for strategy, encouragement or casual communication. Along with the in-game chat feature for each team, there is a discussion board that allows for wider interactions with other players and teams. This allows for open discussion about the game, but will also encourage gifting in-game items, verse sharing, or more in-depth community building like Bible studies, fellowship, or discipleship opportunities.
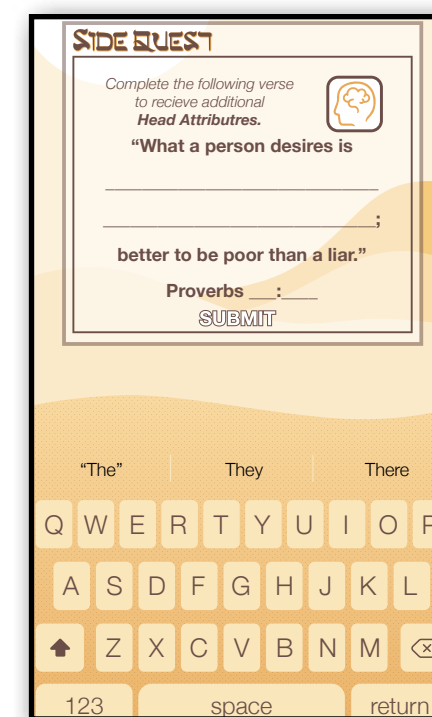
Figure #51
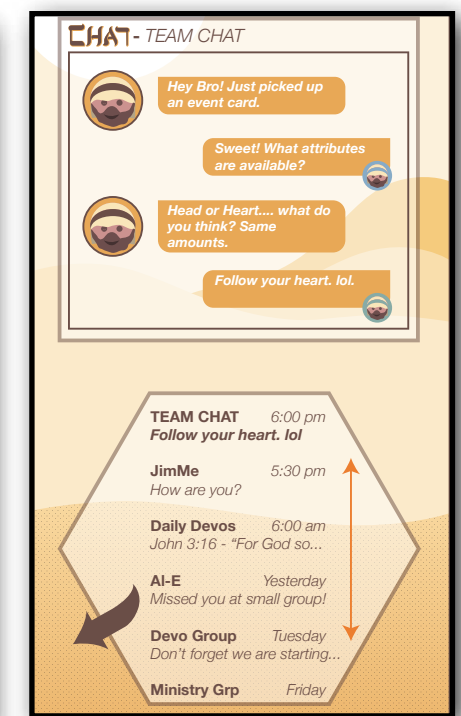
Figure #52

Deliverable #2
Brand Style Guide

A brand style guide is sometimes referred to as a "brand guideline". This publication is used as a reference document that defines how brand elements should be used in any print or digital representation of the brand. This would include video games, as well. Brand guides are meant to determine correct usage of logos, colors, image style and typography, among other things.

Not only does the brand style guide define future design choices and application, but it should also follow the brand aesthetic. In this case, the brand style guide was designed with the research of aesthetic choices preferred by millennials in mind. The layouts are clean and simple with ample use of space. The typography, as mentioned earlier, consists of Helvetica Neue as it is a sans serif font whose strength is in its readability and clean lines (Saville). The entire layout was designed with a "soft, approachable, and authentic" (DeSantis) color palette that is "aesthetically pleasing to interact with" (Lau) following what DeSantis refers to as the "millennial aesthetic".

This publication was designed as a multiple-page booklet that could be viewed online or in print (Figure #53). The page dimensions are 7.5 inches wide x 8.25 inches tall. An open spread would measure 15 inches wide x 8.25 inches. The brand guide would be made available as a downloadable .pdf file that can be accessed through the internet on The Way's home page and then printed as needed.

While the brand guide might not directly address the goal of increasing biblical literacy through increased interaction with scripture, it does set
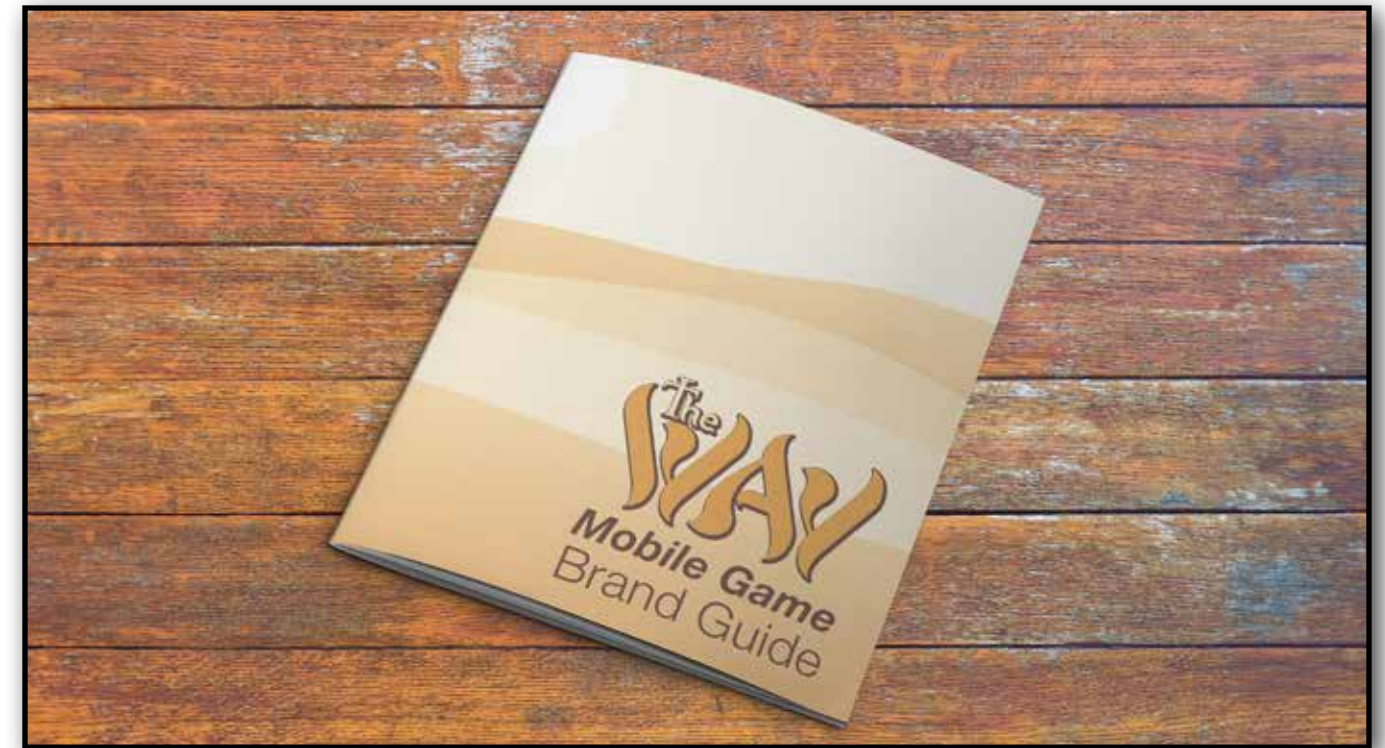
Figure #53

Figure #54

Table of Contents
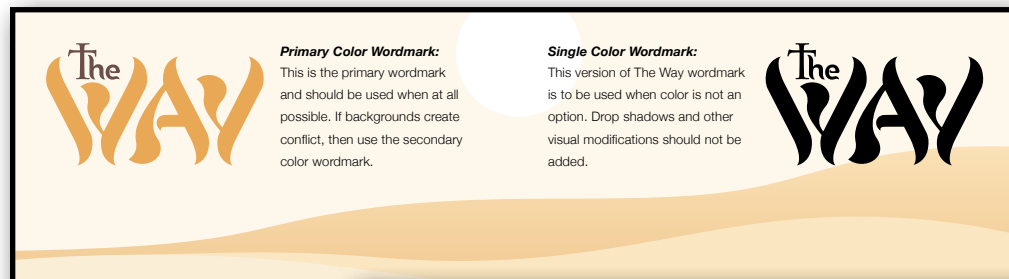
Figure #55

Figure #56

Figure #57

Figure #58

Figure #59

the foundation for the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) of the game. Since the brand guide was designed with a specific target audience in mind, it becomes a vital step in reaching out to millennials by defining a visual language that they can relate to.

The samples depicted are facing pages or spreads of the document in order to see what information is contained inside. The front cover (Figure #54) shows the logo used as part of the booklet title while the back cover demonstrates how the brand guide, including the color palette (Figure #15), has been applied to the user interface of the game. These mockups were added as examples of the brand guide in use.

The booklet is broken up into five sections (Figure #55); Wordmark Usage (Figure #56), Lettermark Usage (Figure #57), Color Palette (Figure #58), Typography (Figure #59), and Sample Applications (Figure #59). In order to follow the "millennial aesthetic" descriptions were kept short and precise as they prefer interfaces that are simplified and to the point (DeSantis).

The assets used to create this booklet were discussed more in depth in Chapter 3: Visual Process of this thesis. The intent of this deliverable was created as way to formerly organize the different assets and present them while following the visual choices determined by research. This guide served as a bridge between the game concept and creating the user interface of the game play layout.

Deliverable #3
Game Play Layout

I chose to design The Way's gaming layout in portrait mode instead of landscape to give the game a unique perspective that allows for single hand control. While the majority of mobile apps are designed in portrait mode, there are more landscape or horizontally based games in the mobile market. The benefits of using portrait mode in this case is that it "provides a better tactile experience for the user" ("Portrait Mode vs.") and it fits the design of the game better from a user experience perspective. The game play has also been simplified to single clicks, so the need for two hands in landscape seemed unnecessary. This also provides a unique experience which is what millennials look for (Lau).

The startup screen of the game (Figure #60) shows how the brand style guide determined the visual direction of the game. By sticking to the predetermined aesthetics, the interface or UI has a visual tone that will resonate with millennial users by following a style that is clean and simple (DeSantis). The startup screen is followed by several splash screens that can be animated in future iterations. These offer a little insight about the game and its premise. In an effort to maintain a neutral stance on Scripture and remain free from any denominational preference, the splash screens focus more on the experience of role-playing in first-century Israel rather than promote this game as being Bible driven. The goal is to increase interaction through the game, but that does not mean that the Bible becomes the primary focus.

Basic Layout: The layout is broken up vertically in half. The purpose of this split is to separate informational content from actionable buttons
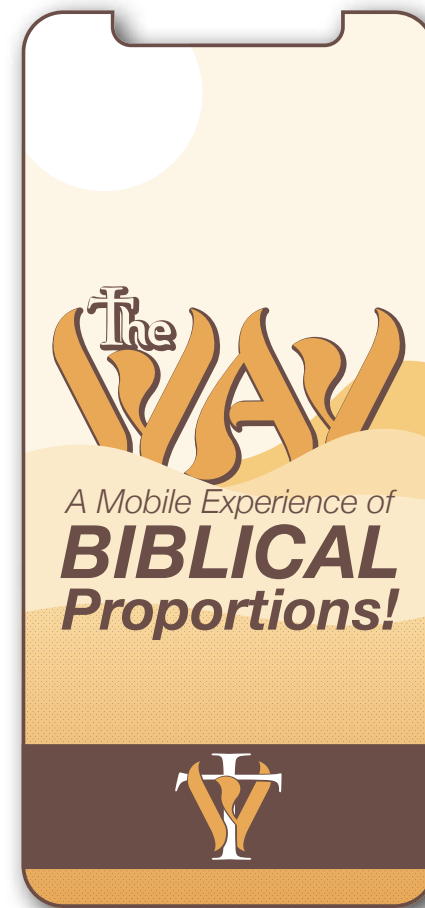
Figure #60

Figure #61
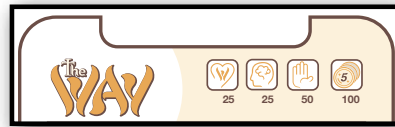
Figure #62

Figure #63
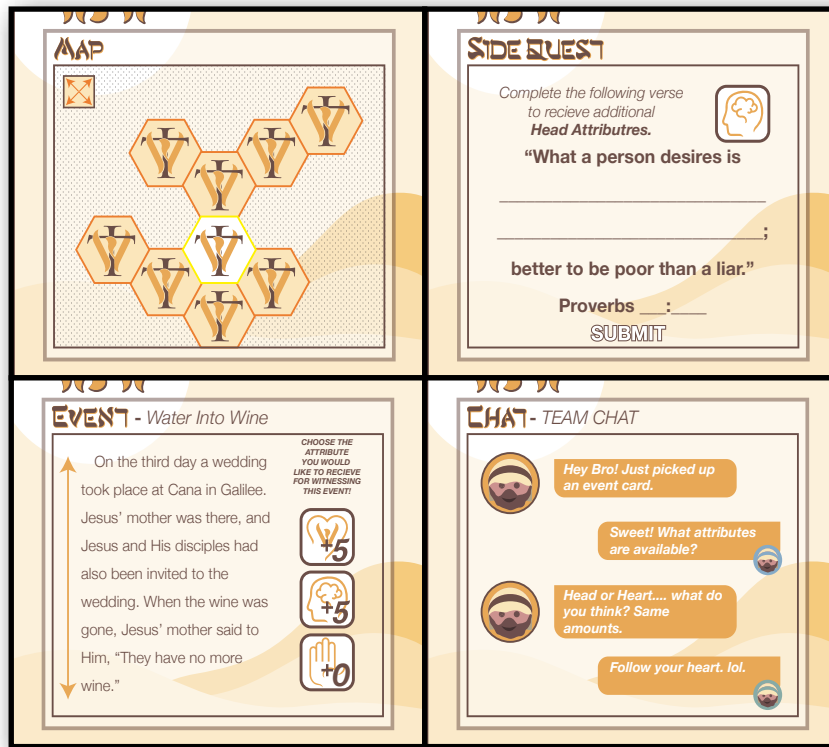
Figure #64

Figure #65

or icons. The upper half is informational (Figure #63). The square box will change depending on the situation. If the screen contains too much information, there is an orange scroll bar that allows the player to reveal more.

The hexagon in the lower half of the screen (Figure #64) depicts the player's current location or situation. Generally, this scene will show you and your teammates and some in-game characters that you can interact with, artifacts that you may collect or purchase and events or situations that you can experience. People or objects that you can interact with will have a glow about them setting them apart from other characters (Figure #64).

Other parts of the game layout include a tally board on the top right of the game (Figure #61). This shows the user the total amounts of Heart, Head, and Hand attributes along with the amount of gold coins they have earned. At the bottom of the screen are five actionable buttons (Figure #62). They relate to the three attributes, plus the gold coins, but the fourth button will trigger the chat room and can be used at anytime. I chose to make the chat feature accessible at all times, because this is an important aspect of the game in terms of building relationships and something that millennials have come to expect as many prefer to socialize online more than in a physical space (Mota).

Game Play: You begin the game by choosing a character to play as (Figure #65). As mentioned within the game concept, you can choose to be a beggar, fisherman, Pharisee, Sadducee, scribe, tax collector, or tent maker. Each character begins with their own attributes which can be seen on the right hand side of the upper screen. There is also

a description of each with historical and biblical context in order to choose which character to play as. The character chosen determines how much of the different attributes are actually playable in any give situation. The role-playing approach was chosen since RPGs are second to puzzle/match-3 games among millennials (Perik).

Once characters and a team of up to 4 have been chosen, the team appears in the lower hexagon map (Figure #65). This area will change at random every time a team chooses a direction to head in. Brown arrows represent areas they have been in, while the green arrows lead to undiscovered parts of the map. The team can return to any area they please, but the situation in those areas may change from what they had experienced before. As they discover new areas the upper map reveals an overall map showing them what they have discovered.

In the lower hexagon, the player may come across a variety of in-game players and items. Some are interactive and are revealed by a glowing aura about them (Figure #67). By tapping on these the upper square will change and show how you can interact with them. Some may share wisdom, invite you to events, or be a part of a task or situation that your team can choose to interact with.

The example in Figure #67 depicts a team being approached by a beggar who may be leprous and has a broken cart. The team can decide to apply some Head, Heart, or Hand attributes, offer gold coins or simply walk away. They do so by clicking on the lower buttons. The chat feature is always available in order to get feedback from the team and will show notifications when messages have been missed.
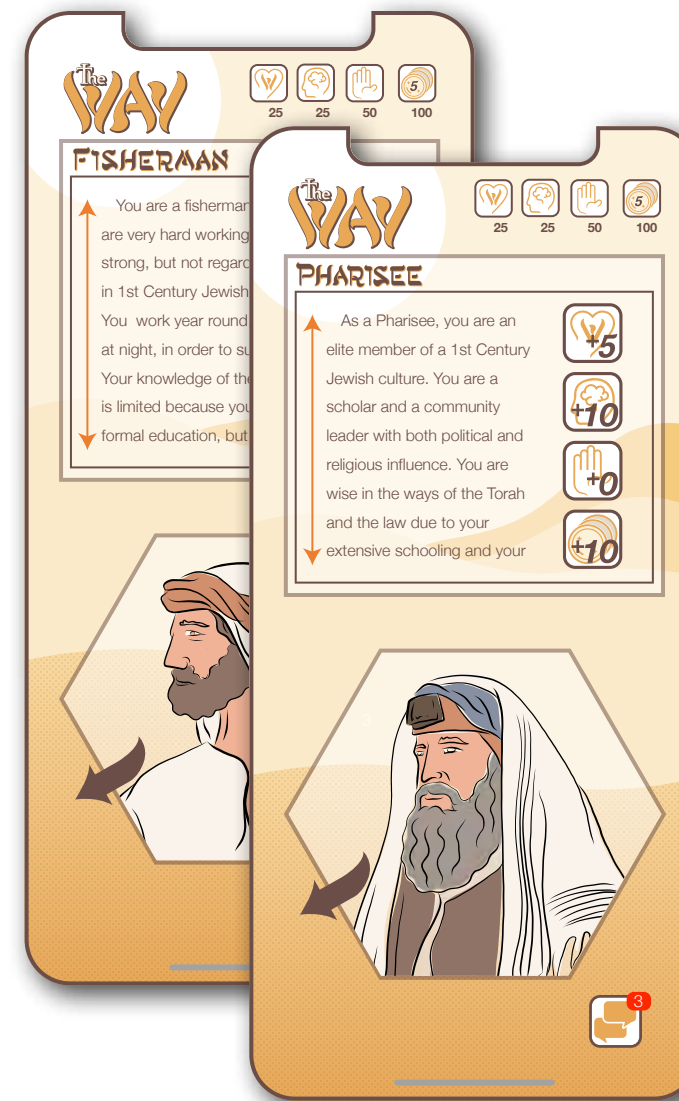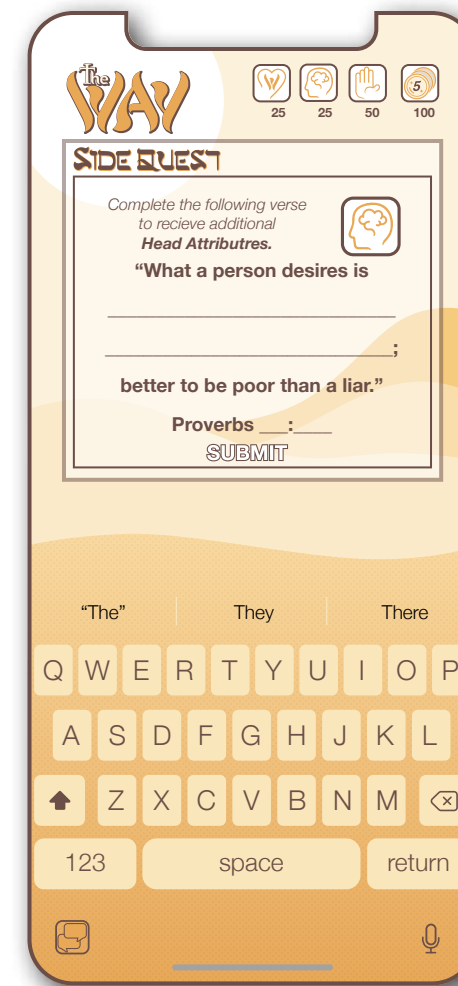

Figure #66

Figure #67

Figure #68
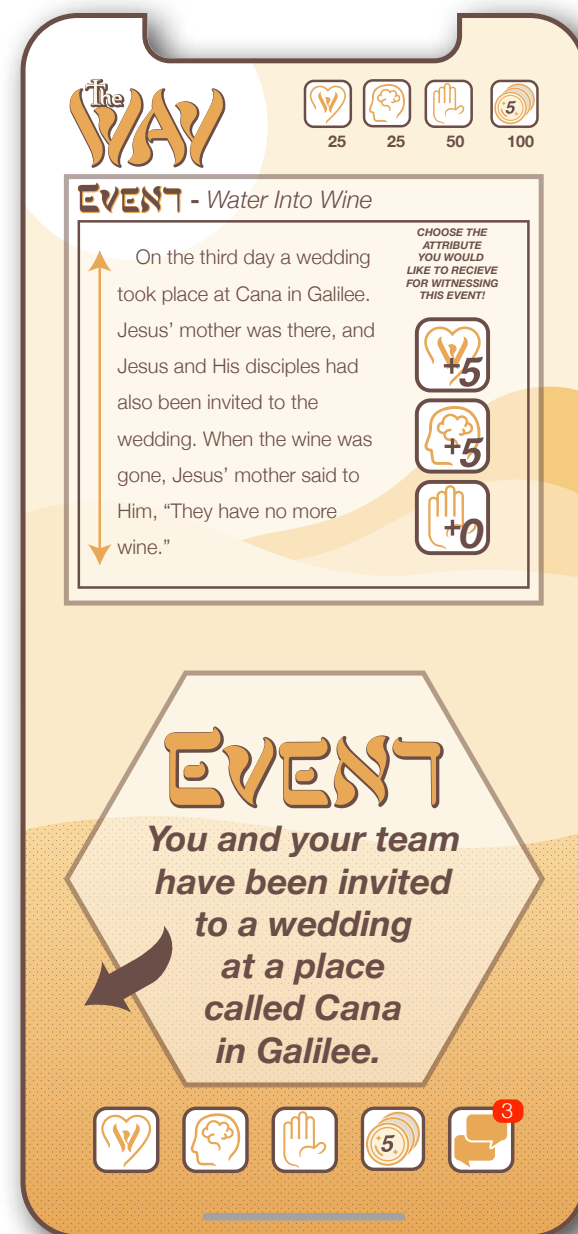
Figure #69

The map can also lead to directly to special events (Figure #68). These can be Biblical or historical events from that period. Descriptions or Bible passages are revealed in the top square. The area will also depict what can be earned by "experiencing" these events. The player and team can choose what attributes they want to earn. They apply these attributes by clicking on the appropriate option in the square.

As the game progresses, there are opportunities for side quests and puzzles (Figure #69) that also help in earning attributes. These can range from historical and Biblical trivia to completing memory verses from the Old Testament. Here is another opportunity to engage with your team or other players as the chat icon replaces the emoji icon in the keyboard (Figure #69). Collaboration is important to millennials and to this game.

Besides the infusion of scripture throughout the game, community is one of the more important aspects to this visual solution. This is done through the chat room section of the game which can be triggered at any time by clicking on the chat icon in the lower right (Figure #70). The icon will even show unread messages as they appear. The intention of the chat rooms are for building community and communication. This can occur between teams, various players, or the entire Way community. It works similarly to online discussion boards where all topics are welcome. Devotional groups, Bible studies, accountability groups, and other similar groups are strongly encouraged, though.

The layout and game play is designed this way to maintain simplicity so that users can focus on the experiential side of the game. The game provides historical and Biblical exploration through the characters, the

events, situations, and the side quests or puzzles with the hopes of engaging users with the scriptures.

Since the Bible, as a book and in its entirety, can be daunting, chunking the data and presenting it to a viewer in this format seems to fit the manner in which millennials learn. They prefer exploration and gathering data from multiple sources to being told what is true from a singular source (Carlson). This game is not just a blend of history and the Bible, but adding the online community through the chat rooms opens up opportunity for the type of in-depth discussion that millennials seem to crave.

The overall purpose of the game concept, the brand guide and the actual game is to draw millennials closer to the Bible so that this engagement would, in turn, increase biblical literacy. This mobile RPG that weaves the Bible and history within its game play, and provides the opportunity for a strong, interactive online community has the potential of meeting millennial Christians where they are and help them do just that.

I believe that what I produced would appeal to millennials as the visuals I developed followed the research that I found. I also feel that by incorporating social features in the game it would appeal to this generation's desire for community, especially community that exists online (Motta).

Figure #70

Figure #71
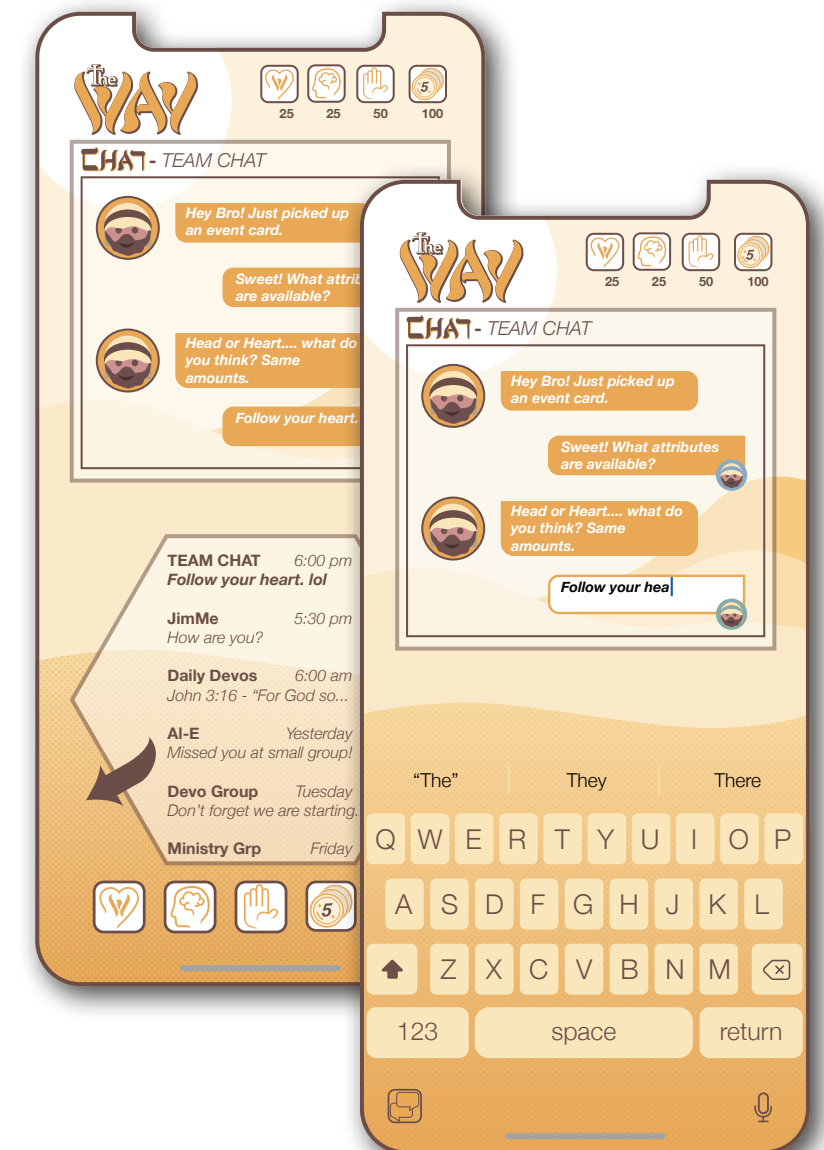
Figure #72
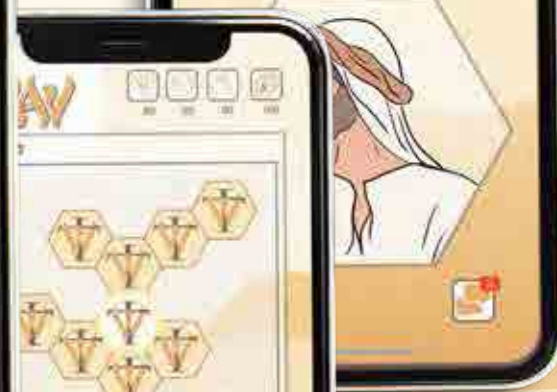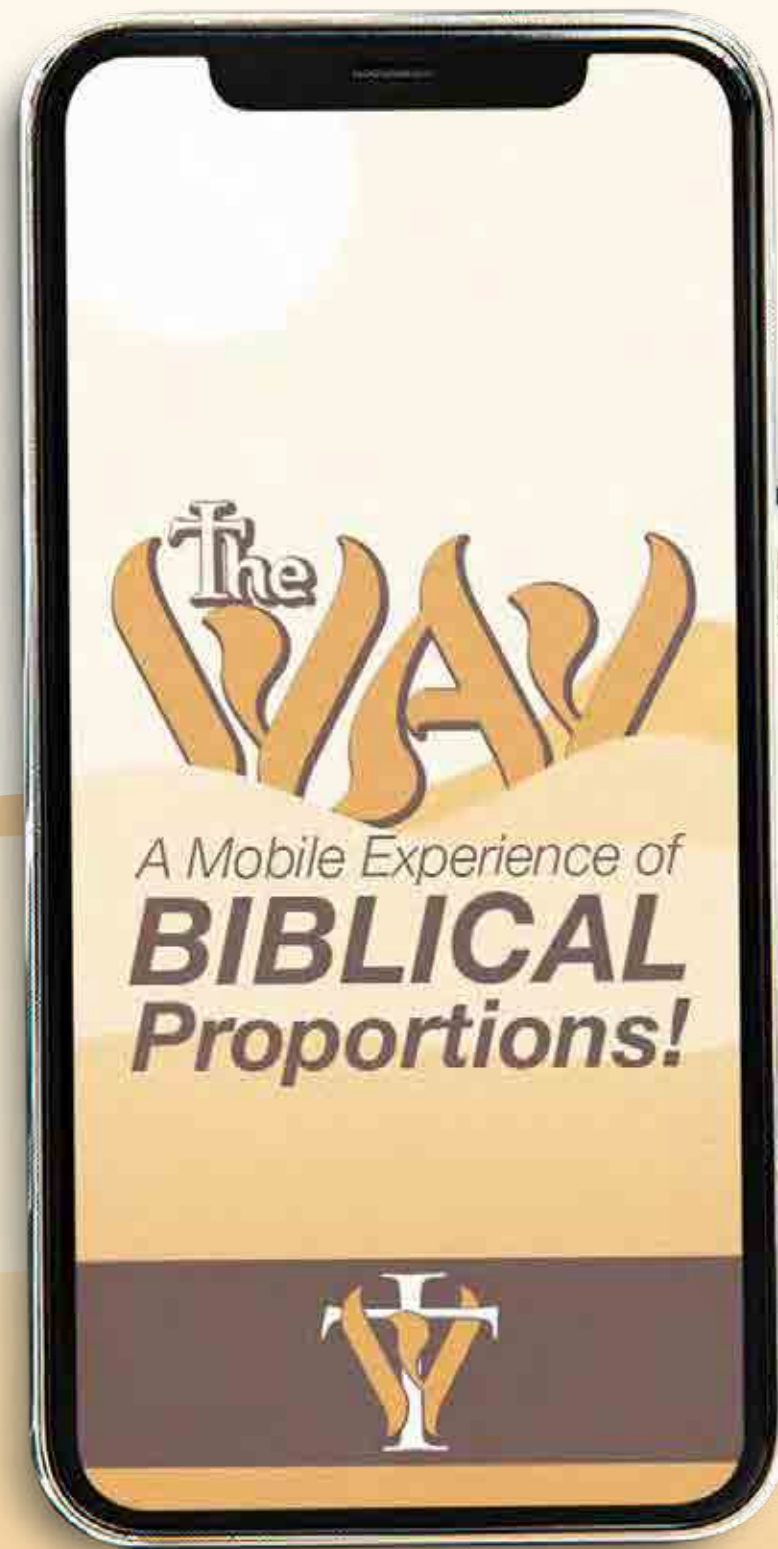
Figure #73

Figure #74

Figure #75

Figures #76-78

5
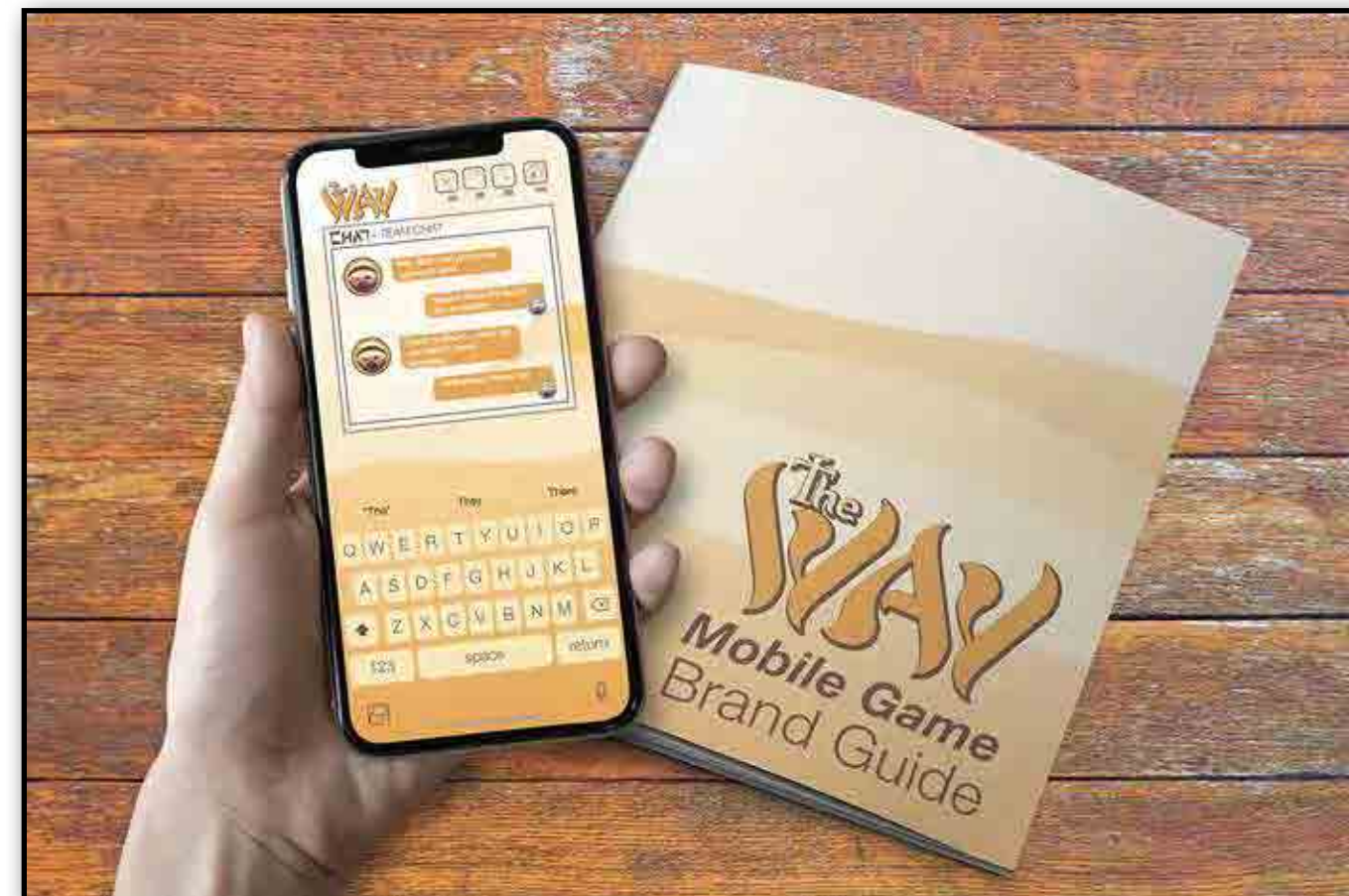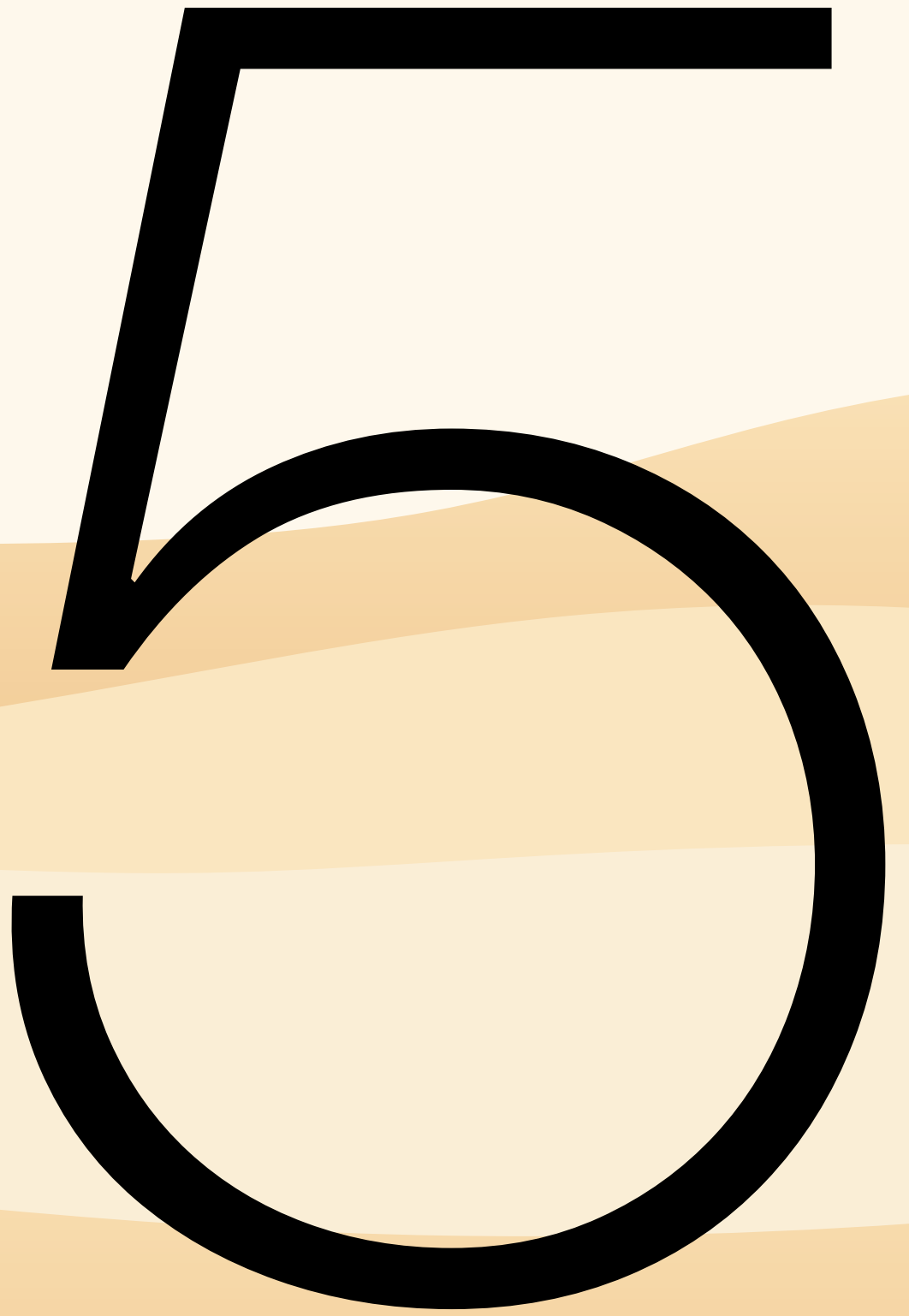
CHAPTER
CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The research I conducted for this thesis was based on the lack of Biblical literacy among millennial Christians. The research showed that millennial Christians are distancing themselves from the Bible at an alarming rate (Fulks), but the question whether it, in itself, is affecting doctrine, evangelism, or apologetics was not clearly answered. The research showed that a lack of Biblical literacy was rooted in the simple lack of interaction between Christians and the Bible. This basic fact was the driving force behind my visual solution.

My visual solution was driven by the goal of increasing Biblical literacy, but that was to be second to the simple increase of interactivity of millennials with scripture. After understanding more about millennials, I came to understand that in order to increase this interactivity I needed to create a visual solution that would meet millennials where they are - online and as a community who likes playing games (Porter). What better way to meet them there than with a mobile game that encouraged biblical interaction as part of the game play.

I approached my visual solution with hesitancy. I am not a gamer, nor am I a game designer. I thought that as a graphic designer, perhaps, an ad or social media campaign that promotes Bible reading and attempts to raise awareness could be enough. However, I felt that in order to truly address the issue, I needed to push myself into developing something more.

Unable to actually create a functioning game, I chose to create three deliverables that I felt could be used to start the ball rolling in a positive direction. I chose to create a game concept, define a visual language that could be used to drive the aesthetics behind the game, and devise a unique layout that could eventually be incorporated into an actual mobile game.

As I moved forward in this process, I researched trends in visual aesthetics and gaming preferences among millennials. I used case studies and visual analyses from my research as a starting point in order to understand what would appeal to my target audience. I came to realize that millennials prefer clean and simple design in both aesthetics and the mechanics of the game (DeSantis). They have experienced the internet from the early chaos of myspace and prefer their content to be easily accessible and orderly (Lau). This millennial aesthetic became the primary influence behind the three deliverables that I created.

The game concept, the brand style guide, and the game layout were all designed with the fundamental goal of providing an opportunity for millennial Christians to engage in and understand the scripture they have been avoiding. By providing the Bible in a digital format, as an experiential activity through an RPG mobile game, in small chunks, and with the support of a like-minded community I feel that players of The Way will not only engage, but enjoy interacting with the Bible that forms their basic beliefs in Jesus Christ.

Moving Forward: I recognize that to truly understand whether the solution is viable, more work needs to be done in the development of the game. I imagine a good starting point for this would be to gather funding through a grant or private donor as the process could be

costly. When seeking funding, I would look towards private donations or maybe even crowdfunding over the support of a single church or organization. I would stress that the game should never be seen as if it is solely supported by a specific church, denomination, or organization. The game is created for all to encounter the Bible and not as an evangelical tool that pushes a single doctrine or agenda.

I have thought about the process of development beyond what I have presented and feel that it would be best to gather a team before moving forward. I believe that a combination of historians, theologians, and Bible scholars would be important to incorporate both historical and biblical accuracy in the game situations, game play, and overall presentation of first century Judea. The team would also need illustrators and designers to continue developing the aesthetics of the game, create splash screens, and possibly even transition animations for the game. They would also be vital in promoting the game through social media and the web. Also, the game could not exist without the use of developers and programmers to actually create the game. They would determine the technical aspects of the game, not just in functionality, but creating databases and writing the code and scripts to make a seamless experience for the players. A key focus for the developers would be in creating a robust message board to create the type of community space millennials thrive on.

Throughout the process, we would need to test the game, not just for playability, but to see how the interactions with Scripture affect the players and whether the communication aspects of the game are seen as a viable method of developing community. I believe this type of testing should be ongoing, even after the game has been released.

Personal Insight: I firmly believe that this process has been personally beneficial by reminding me of the impact that the Bible has on those of us who believe in it. It has highlighted the importance of biblical literacy into my own life and made me aware of my own complacency with biblical engagement. Throughout this process, I have considered how believers from previous generations have memorized entire books and passages that were passed down orally and how I still struggle with explaining what it is I believe. I have also become more aware of how doctrine can be watered down when we fail to pay attention to context and how this could lead to a poor understanding of the Christian faith.

In terms of design, this thesis and visual solution has pushed me out of my comfort zones. As I mentioned earlier, I am not a gamer and have never participated in a true RPG, but understanding the interests of millennials, I came to realize that it was necessary for me to broaden my horizons. I still have plenty to learn if I follow my desires to finish the game, but had it not been for this thesis and research, I may never have stepped towards this new direction.

Now, I do not believe that a mobile game is the only answer to the biblical literacy problem, but I do believe that we need to take an active role in incorporating the Bible and its wisdom into our daily lives so that it does not become "a moldy book and a bad memory" (Reed 154). We tend to compartmentalize the Bible to exist only within the pages of a black, leather-bound, text-heavy book instead of following the words of Katie Edwards and allowing the Bible to be "woven in the very fabric of contemporary culture" (Phillips 47). This includes mobile based video games.

APPENDIX

Figure 01: *Gospels hardcover book cover.* (n.d.). AlabasterCo.com https://www.alabasterco.com/cdn/shop/products/Gospels_ Hardcover_Digital_Mock_2fcedbe3-29b8-483b-8df7- 4b80514cdacb_720x.jpg?v=1631902543. Pg. 59.

Figure 02: *Gospels hardcover book cover.* (n.d.). AlabasterCo.com https://www.alabasterco.com/cdn/shop/products/Gospels_ Hardcover_Digital_Mock_2fcedbe3-29b8-483b-8df7- 4b80514cdacb_720x.jpg?v=1631902543. Pg. 59.

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Figure 11: *Bible app in various formats.* (n.d.). YouVersion.com. https:// blog.youversion.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/hero-en- with-computer-768x376.png. Pg. 65.

Figure 12: *YouVersion app home screen.* (n.d.). AmericanBible. org. https://assets.news.americanBible.org/uploads/ thumbnails/_825w/Bible-app-helps-millions-engage-with- gods-word-American-Bible-Society-Record-Fall-2017.jpg.

Mockup Sources:

Freepik

Image by rawpixel.com on Freepik

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