The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church

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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Joseph G. Austin

Lynchburg, Virginia
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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

__________________________________________
Dr. Dan Burrell
Mentor

__________________________________________
Dr. Rod Dempsey
Reader
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Joseph G. Austin

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019

Mentor: Dr. Dan Burrell

The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church:

The degradation of biblical literacy has increased in recent years to the point that many church attendees have very little actual knowledge or understanding of Biblical truths. This lack of knowledge is a direct correlation to the lack of moral foundations for many of today’s believers, particularly with younger generations. The goal of this paper is to provide a balanced, substantive, and interactive plan for churches, large and small, to integrate into their discipleship programs or use to assist the local church in establishing a discipleship program. The process will include surveys gauging the level of biblical literacy among self-identified Christians, and a way forward to encourage a regular reading of God’s Word.

ABSTRACT LENGTH: 113 Words
# Contents

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... ix  
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................................... xi  
Chapter 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1  
  Ministry Context ................................................................................................................ 3  
  Problem Presented .......................................................................................................... 5  
  Purpose Statement ........................................................................................................... 8  
  Basic Assumptions ......................................................................................................... 9  
  Definitions ....................................................................................................................... 10  
  Limitations and Delimitations .......................................................................................... 13  
  Thesis Statement ........................................................................................................... 14  
Chapter 2: The Need for Biblical Literacy .......................................................................... 15  
  Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 15  
    Scriptures Regarding the Importance of Biblical Literacy ............................................. 15  
      Old Testament .......................................................................................................... 15  
      New Testament ....................................................................................................... 17  
    Published Books, Articles, Journals, and Websites ..................................................... 20  
    University Dissertations ............................................................................................. 20  
    Books ........................................................................................................................... 24  
    Journal Articles/Web Pages ......................................................................................... 33  
  Theological Foundations ................................................................................................. 37  
    The Bible is God’s Special Revelation and Discerner of Men’s Hearts ......................... 37  
    The Bible is the Inspired and Inerrant Word of God for the Church and Believer ........ 39  
  Theoretical Foundations ................................................................................................. 40  
Chapter 3: Biblical Literacy Since the Early Church ............................................................. 43  
  Biblical Literacy in the Early Church .............................................................................. 44  
    The Apostles and the Early Church Fathers ................................................................. 44  
    The Gospels ................................................................................................................. 44  
    The Apostle’s View of Their Writings as Scripture ....................................................... 45  
    The Early Church ....................................................................................................... 46  
  The Early Church Councils and Biblical Literacy ............................................................ 48  
    Arianism and the Council of Nicaea .............................................................................. 49  
    The Council of Constantinople (381 AD) ....................................................................... 51  
    Comparing the Creeds ............................................................................................... 52

v
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Biblical Canon</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Earlier Date for the New Testament Codex</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canon as Liturgy</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pre-Reformation, The Reformation and Biblical Literacy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pre-Reformation</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reformation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Enlightenment and Biblical Literacy</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America and Biblical Literacy</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early American History</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Branches of the American Government</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Presidents</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Supreme Court</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Early Congress, Other Early Leaders</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers of Our Fathers</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent American History</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Calvin’s Influence</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Education</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Digital World</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Results</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Demographics</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Response Demographics</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Responses</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark Legend</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs About the Bible</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship / Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Knowledge</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Christians</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Christians Among Their Peers</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on the Best Definition of the Bible</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on the Bible Providing Purpose and Fulfillment in Life</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on Heaven and Hell</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblically engaged Pastors</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to Benchmarks</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-Christian Responses........................................................................................................... 108
Comparisons with the Census Bureau on Religious Affiliations........................................... 111
Chapter 5: Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 112
Results of Survey and Conclusions................................................................................................ 112
Self-Identified Christians and Bible Engagement........................................................................ 112
Self-Identified Christians and Spiritual Disciplines................................................................. 115
Self-Identified Christians and Bible Knowledge........................................................................... 119
Overall Survey Conclusions ........................................................................................................ 119
Pastors Among The Respondents ............................................................................................... 121
American Bible Society Survey vs. Project Survey...................................................................... 122
Origins of the Bible..................................................................................................................... 123
The Bible and a Purpose-Filled Life............................................................................................. 124
Bible Knowledge Self-Assessment.............................................................................................. 125
The Bible as Transformative......................................................................................................... 126
The Most Important Biblical Directive....................................................................................... 127
Women and Men......................................................................................................................... 128
Locations Within the United States ............................................................................................. 129
Races............................................................................................................................................... 130
Income Levels.............................................................................................................................. 132
Sampling Accuracy...................................................................................................................... 133
National Census Bureau Trends for the Religiously-Affiliated.................................................... 134
Positive Trends from Global Christianity ................................................................................... 135
Lessons Learned from This Project ............................................................................................. 138
A Simple Solution: Bible Literacy is a Key to Meaningful Discipleship........................................ 139
God’s Word Changes Your Reality............................................................................................... 141
God’s Word Changes Lives........................................................................................................... 141
God’s Word Changes Society........................................................................................................ 142
How Best to Disciple for Bible Literacy: Reading the Word......................................................... 144
R.E.A.D. the Word Devotionally.................................................................................................. 145
R.E.A.D. the Word Experientially................................................................................................ 145
R.E.A.D. the Word Theologically................................................................................................ 146
The Discipleship Process and Bible Reading............................................................................... 146
What is Next? The Church Will R.E.A.D., The Pastor Expounds!............................................... 150
Discipleship Process for Biblical Literacy: R.E.A.D...................................................................... 154
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis Chan And We Are Church</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil Cole and Life Transformation Groups</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Book of Common Prayer</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading Plans</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading Resources</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1 What is Your Age Group? ......................................................... 92
Figure 2 Education .............................................................................. 92
Figure 3 General View of Religion ....................................................... 92
Figure 4 What is Your Gender? ............................................................ 92
Figure 5 Where Do You Live? .............................................................. 93
Figure 6 What is Your Race? ................................................................. 93
Figure 7 Household Income .................................................................. 93
Figure 8 Marital Status ......................................................................... 94
Figure 9 Christian or Non-Christian .................................................... 94
Figure 10 What Group of Christians Do You Identify With? .................... 94
Figure 11 BM #1: What Do You Believe About the Bible? ..................... 95
Figure 12 BM #4: The Bible Provides A Greater Sense of Purpose ........ 96
Figure 13 BM #5: The Bible is Divinely Inspired and God’s Revelation to Man ................................................................................... 96
Figure 14 BM #6: Without Trusting Jesus People Will Spend Eternity in Hell ..................................................................................... 97
Figure 15 The Bible Teaches that God is 3 in 1 (Trinity) ......................... 97
Figure 16 Saved by Grace Alone Without Works .................................. 97
Figure 17 BM #12: Holy Spirit is Fully Divine and Illuminates Scripture ......................................................................................... 98
Figure 18 Church Attendance ................................................................... 98
Figure 19 How Many Bibles Are Owned? ................................................ 99
Figure 20 BM #2: Reading the Bible Outside of Religious Service ........ 99
Figure 21 BM #3: Has Personal Use of Bible Increased or Decreased? .... 100
Figure 22 BM #7: Part of Discipleship Class That Teaches Bible Principles ......................................................................................... 100
Figure 23 Have You Ever Attended a Christian Small Group? ............... 101
Figure 24 BM #8: Small Groups Are Important to Biblical Literacy ......... 101
Figure 25 BM #9: Small Groups Are Necessary for Spiritual Growth ....... 101
Figure 26 BM #10: Obedience to Scripture is Very Important ............... 101
Figure 27 BM #11: Important to Win the Lost by Words and Lifestyle .... 101
Figure 28 Importance of Memorizing Scripture ...................................... 102
Figure 29 How Often Do You Pray? ....................................................... 102
Figure 30 By This All Will Know You Are My Disciples ......................... 103
Figure 31 How Many Books in the Bible? .............................................. 103
Figure 32 What Books Make Up The Pentateuch? ................................ 103
Figure 33 This Book of the Bible Does Not Mention God ..................... 103
Figure 34 Hebrew Names of Daniel’s Three Friends .............................. 103
Figure 35 Fill in The Blanks for Matthew 6:33 ...................................... 104
Figure 36 Great Faith or Little Faith? .................................................... 104
Figure 37 He Was Set Free Instead of Jesus ......................................... 104
Figure 38 Redeemed from The Curse Of .............................................. 104
Figure 39 Biblically engaged Christians ............................................... 104
Figure 40 Biblically engaged Christians Among Their Peers ................. 105
Figure 41 Evangelicals vs. Others on the Best Definition of the Bible ....... 106
Figure 42 Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Other on Purpose and Fulfillment ................................................................................... 106
Figure 43 Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Other on Heaven and Hell ......................................................................................... 106
Figure 44 Biblically engaged Pastors .................................................... 107
Figure 45 Biblically engaged Response to Benchmarks Among Their Peers ......................... 107
Figure 46 Non-Christian Responses ............................................................................... 108
Figure 47 Census Bureau Religious Affiliation .............................................................. 111
## List of Abbreviations

### General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>equals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>//</td>
<td>parallel passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca.</td>
<td>circa (around)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Common Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cf.</td>
<td>confer (compare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chap(s.)</td>
<td>chapter(s)</td>
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### Equals

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<tr>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td>exempli gratia (for example)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gk.</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e.</td>
<td>id est (that is)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lit.</td>
<td>literally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trans.</td>
<td>translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v(v).</td>
<td>verse(s)</td>
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### Bible Translations

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<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSB</td>
<td>Christian Standard Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>New King James Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPT</td>
<td>The Passion Translation</td>
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### Old Testament

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<tr>
<td>Exod</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev</td>
<td>Leviticus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deut</td>
<td>Deuteronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judg</td>
<td>Judges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Sam</td>
<td>1-2 Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Kgs</td>
<td>1-2 Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Chr</td>
<td>1-2 Chronicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neh.</td>
<td>Nehemiah</td>
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<td>Esth</td>
<td>Esther</td>
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<td>Job</td>
<td>Job</td>
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<td>Ps/Pss</td>
<td>Psalms</td>
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<td>Prov</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
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<td>Eccl</td>
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<td>Matthew</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2 Cor</td>
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<td>Col</td>
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### New Testament

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<td>Mark</td>
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<td>John</td>
<td>John</td>
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<td>Rom</td>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1-2 Pet</td>
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<td>1-3 John</td>
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<td>Jude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Kenneth Gourlay shares a devastating synopsis of the state of Americans regarding biblical literacy:

We are a nation of biblical illiterates whose worldview, ideology, cosmology, and theology are internally inconsistent. We are morally vacuous and intellectually threadbare – and the problem is only getting worse. Our theology is a combination of existentialism, nihilism, theism, Eastern Mysticism, postmodernism, deism, pragmatism, experimentalism, instructionalism, constructivism, progressivism, and naturalism (Barna, 2003). Woodrow Kroll represents many evangelical pastors and Christian researchers when he states that America has been ‘in a Bible literacy tailspin for so long that no one even recognizes that the ground is rapidly approaching and disaster is imminent’.1

Charles Wilhelm states further that “The church has no other ground or guideline for her faith than scripture. We cannot truly express our faith in any other way than in reverent subjection to this word, and to the word alone.”2 And Hank Hanegraaff opens his book with this quote from Thomas Watson: “The Bible is a rock of diamonds, a chain of pearls, the sword of the Spirit…the map by which he daily walks; the sundial by which he sets his life; the balance in which he weighs his actions.”3 William Jeynes noted the importance of biblical literacy in America when he stated that the “American citizenry is recognizing that one cannot truly claim to be an educated individual without a working knowledge of the Bible.”4

The Pastor and the local churches in America must have this fundamental question of the value of Biblical literacy answered and must find a way forward to make any real, eternal change in believers. What is the goal for any church and Christian ministry regarding interaction with believers? The goal of every Christian and the Church should be to develop biblically-literate

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disciples; disciples who are convinced and convicted of taking that gospel to the entire world. Biblical illiteracy contributes to the failure of churches to present Christ to the world in a life-changing manner.

David Kinnaman mentions three significant changes in the American landscape that are reshaping how believers read and engage with the Bible. The first change is an increasing skepticism towards the origins, relevance, and authority of the Scriptures. The 2nd change is the new moral code (or lack thereof) that permeates society, which has a focus on self-fulfillment as the cultural measure and rather than the scriptures. The 3rd change is the use of technology to access the Bible, making it more accessible than any other time in human history.5

Dr. Woodrow Kroll has written extensively that America is in a biblical crisis of enormous consequence. As he noted in the preface of Taking Back the Good Book, “The Book so many love is not the book so many read. In fact, Bible reading has declined sharply over the years. And so has Bible knowledge.”6 The lack of biblical literacy affects so much more than just the general knowledge a Christian should have concerning the Scriptures. This apparent lack of biblical literacy can poison the potential for the Church to fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Further, the overall lack of biblical literacy, which includes a lack of regular reading of Scripture, has led to a generation of young men and women who have either left the church or are no longer actively participating in the church. David Kinnaman notes, “More than half of all Christian teens and twenty-somethings leave active involvement in church,” and the

“Christian community has failed to equip young adults to live ‘in, but not of’ the world – to follow Christ in the midst of profound cultural change.”

Biblical illiteracy affects more than just a Christian’s ability to quote scripture or share a narrative from Sunday School Bible stories. There may be many reasons why the Evangelical Church has lost its way in lifting God’s Word above the constant barrage of social media, Hollywood, and a growing public skepticism towards the faith of the early Church. The 21st century presents many challenges, yet it offers a tremendous number of possibilities for the Evangelical Church to fulfill Christ’ calling to reach the lost.

Ministry Context

As early as the 1980’s, publications were addressing the growing biblical illiteracy of the American culture. In the midst of these observations, Dr. Judith Stack-Nelson notes that in conversations with other seminary professors it became apparent that while students were learning about the Scriptures, they had not become better readers of the Bible. She continues:

The fact that there is no shortage of new publications coming out on the topic means that, despite the attention, the issue hardly has been resolved, nor is it likely to be in the near future, giving the continuing trends of declining church attendance. The Bible’s role as a - or even the – central narrative . . . is not likely to be recovered soon. While biblical literacy is no doubt valuable in its own right (as is literacy of any sort), it is only the first step, however, in the larger and more important project of helping people – both lay and clergy – become biblical readers and interpreters who are at least competent and ideally better than competent . . . If those of us in theological education settle for merely teaching people about the Bible, we will have left our students holding a bag of mixed seeds and no idea how to grow a garden. Biblical literacy is not enough.

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9 Ibid.
Pastor Kimberly Ashby recognized that her members were uncomfortable sharing the Bible narrative in their day-to-day activities. Their chief complaint was they were not feeling confident with the story of Scripture. So a program was put into place where pastors from four churches led their members through a 31-chapter study “of a condensed Bible, putting the whole story in chronological order using ‘The Story’ series from Max Lucado and Randy Frazee.”

Pastor Ashby notes that the program was such a success that the congregants asked for more extended programs and expanding the small groups. One participant noted, “I have always wanted to read the Bible but have not been able to get through it. Reading this book [The Story] together (with the Bible) has helped me to interpret passages and the sequence of events that I didn’t know or understand. I appreciate the group I am with so much because I am getting to know these wonderful people on a more personal level. I am praying more and reading the Bible more.”

Critics today suggest that people are no longer interested in reading the Bible regularly, or that the narrative is old-fashioned and out-of-date for today’s fast-moving society. However, the Barna Group’s study of the Bible’s influence in America revealed that active young Christians (ages 18-35) “are holding to historically orthodox beliefs about the Bible. In many ways, their commitment to the Scriptures is a rebuke to the stereotypes of younger Christians.” That is some good news for the pastors and churches who want to reach out to the younger generations. However, it is also true that biblical illiteracy continues to rise, and self-identified Christians are reading less and less. As a result, the proclamation of Christ has diminished

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11 Ibid.
significantly. The goal is Christlikeness, and the path to that goal is Biblical literacy. Regularly reading God’s Word can transform lives and relationships, as the participant in Pastor Ashby’s program discovered.

Problem Presented

The problem this project will address is two-fold. First, there is a lack of any viable, biblically-based reading program in many churches. Second, there is a lack of biblical literacy for many believers, regardless of how long they’ve been Christians. The role of Bible literacy is not only of primary concern, but also, based on the commands from God’s Word, it is imperative for a successful and fruitful Christian walk.

The believers in many American churches today have had no formal instruction and guidance through discipleship (including a regular reading program) for establishing a solid foundation of biblical literacy. One sign of a lack of biblical literacy is what many believe concerning Jesus Christ. An example is a survey from the Barna Group that revealed a disturbing trend among younger generations who are less likely to believe that Jesus is a historical figure or God. Along with their views on Christ, many do not have a grasp of the significance of biblical history, the wisdom and poetic books, didactic literature, and the influence of apocalyptic writings on today’s society.

Of the five questions asked of all age groups by Barna regarding who Jesus is, the Millennials and Gen-Xers consistently scored lower on fundamental doctrinal beliefs concerning Jesus. When asked if they believed whether Jesus was sinless, 24% of Millennials said they disagreed strongly. Gen-Xers had an even higher response of disagreeing strongly with 32%.

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Surprisingly, even with a higher number of the younger generation no longer believing essential biblical doctrines of Christ, 46% of Millennials and 59% of Gen-Xers said they had made a personal commitment to Christ.

In a survey by Gallup asking Americans if they believe the Bible is the literal Word of God, less than 24% now believe the Bible is “the actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word.” In Gallup’s survey, Americans were asked to identify with three statements. The Bible is: 1) The actual word of God to be taken literally; 2) Inspired by God, not all to be taken literally, and 3) Fables, history, moral precepts recorded by man. The survey revealed a declining number of self-identified Christians who believe the Bible to be God’s Word, while the percentage of those who define the Bible as merely fables and stories has doubled. Gallup’s pollsters concluded that non-white adults aged 50 and older with little or no college education leaned toward believing the Bible was the actual word of God. White males aged 18 to 49 (both Millennials and Gen-Xers), as well as college graduates, were more skeptical, leaning toward the belief that the Bible was just fables and stories made up by its writers. The indication is that those with more education and the younger generations have moved away from the teachings of the Evangelical Church regarding God’s Word.

In a comprehensive study performed by the Barna Group and the American Bible Society (ABS), some disappointing statistics were gathered on how Americans of all ages view and interact with the Bible. Within the study, several statistics are pertinent to this project in showing the results of having several generations of an increasingly biblical illiteracy. They also reveal the need for the American Church to make the necessary changes to salvage the Gospel

message in the Western world. One example was data collected on the rise of Bible skeptics. While the percentage in 2011 was just 10%, but by 2016 that percentage had grown to 22% of adults, more than doubling in just five years’ time.\textsuperscript{16}

In a 2\textsuperscript{nd} survey important for this project, Barna asked target groups the reasons why their engagement with the Scriptures had decreased. Barna notes that teens and millennials who identified themselves as non-practicing Christians are more likely than any other age group to say their Bible reading has decreased, and the number one reason was a lack of time (49%).\textsuperscript{17} Another factor for the non-practicing Christians was adverse experiences such as a death in a family, or loss of a job, with that group saying “explicitly – that ‘a difficult experience in life caused me to doubt my faith.’”\textsuperscript{18} Did the Church miss prime opportunities to minister Christ’s love to the hurting? Would a dedicated Bible-engaging program have helped increase these Christian’s experience with the Bible and possibly provided the comfort, encouragement, and strength needed to survive and possibly even flourish in the midst of suffering?

A more promising note that still should be of concern was a survey on practicing Christians and the Bible where the majority (over 55%) identified themselves as either “Bible Engaged” or “Bible Friendly,” while approximately 48% identified themselves as either “Bible Neutral” or “Bible Skeptic.”\textsuperscript{19} Barna defines “Bible Engaged” as someone with a high view of Scripture who reads the Bible four or more times per week. “Bible Friendly” is the person who also has a high view of Scripture but reads it less frequently. The “Bible Neutral” person has a lower, but not negative, view of Scripture. Moreover, the “Bible Skeptic” believes the Bible is

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 56. Barna defines Bible skeptics as those who believe there is no God behind the Bible.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 68. Barna defines “practicing Christians” as self-identified Christians who say their faith is very important in their lives and who attended a worship service within the past month.
just another book of teachings written by men. This shows that while there is a slim majority of people who have favorable views of Scripture, there is still a significant percentage of people in America that do not, and that number is growing.

What is the Church to make of these numbers? In light of these responses, it is no surprise that “only 11 percent of Southern Baptist Churches are experiencing healthy growth.”

There is little to no effective discipleship taking place in many American Churches, nor ones that include a vigorous engagement with God’s Word. Sadly, among younger generations, the influences of a post-Christian society are taking its toll. This project will evaluate society’s current views and understanding of biblical principles and what the Bible claims both for the Church and non-Christians. A secondary goal is to design a comprehensive biblical literacy discipleship program for churches of all sizes to implement in hopes of stemming the tide of religious ignorance and misunderstandings. The goal for today’s Evangelical Church is to encourage 21st century believers to become disciples of Scripture, who will in turn make disciple-makers, thus help in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the implications of biblical illiteracy for the Evangelical Church in America, which includes both a lack of knowledge about the Bible and a lack of concern about spiritual things. The 2nd purpose is to design and implement a discipleship program of biblical literacy that incorporates the significant narratives of the Scriptures. The goal of this program is to reignite the desire within believers, both leaders and

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20 Ibid., 21.
laypeople, to rediscover God’s Word. The 3rd purpose is to lead believers to discover the power of regular Bible reading for life-change. Every disciple should have the goal of life change and fulfilling participation in God’s Kingdom.

There are several steps for completing these objectives. First, the primary focus will be encouraging the implementation of discipleship reading groups in a local church or cell group, because interactions with other believers is crucial while being exposed to the Word of God. Second, a regular Bible reading program will be designed and implemented within the local church or cell group with the goal of a changed perspective on the value of reading God’s Word. Third, reading programs will be developed for the individual believer that are easily adaptable to the lifestyles of the 21st-century believer.

Basic Assumptions

This writers’ underlying assumption, the one that led to the development of this dissertation, came from the meditation and study of several passages of Scripture. In the Old Testament, the Prophet Habakkuk wrote:

I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the lookout tower. I will watch to see what he will say to me and what I should reply about my complaint. The Lord answered me: ‘Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it. For the vision is yet for the appointed time. . .though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly come and not be late.22

The prophet is seeking a word from God so he can gain some understanding concerning the issues he sees around him. This passage speaks to God’s desire to reveal Himself to the world.

22 Habakkuk 2:1-3 CSB.
More specifically, He speaks to those who are seeking Him out (see Jer. 29:13). An underlying assumption this writer has which relates to this passage is that the believer committed to the cause of Christ will have a desire to know God intimately and will seek out ways to grow in their knowledge and experience with God.

A 2nd passage, found in the New Testament, says:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, and you know that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.  

This is, of course, the Apostle Paul’s charge to his protégé Timothy, having been left by Paul in Ephesus to pastor the church Paul established. This passage speaks to several important concepts on the power of being a consistent reader, and knowledgeable, of God’s Word. God’s Word will give the biblically literate the wisdom and understanding towards salvation only found in Christ. Also, all of God’s Word is profitable for rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness. The ultimate goal is for the man and woman of God to be spiritually complete, equipped to do God’s work. This writer’s underlying assumption from this passage concerns the power of God’s Word to change lives, both while on the earth and in eternity. Leading believers on a path of biblical literacy through a focused discipleship program will change their lives. It will change their sense of purpose as they realize God is calling them to a higher life; one filled with meaning and purpose to touch others for eternity.

Definitions

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23 2 Timothy 3:14-17 CSB.
Biblical Literacy refers to a person’s basic competency with the biblical text. There are four benchmarks of biblical literacy and competency. First, a general familiarity with the significant events and contents of Scripture; second, an understanding of the overarching themes of the Bible; third, an awareness of how each book fits into the metanarrative of Scripture; fourth, an ability to engage in fruitful study of the text, both personally and in groups.24

Drs. David Earley and Rod Dempsey define discipleship as “abandoning the things of the world and following Jesus.”25 The Barna Group and Navigators define discipleship as “becoming more Christ-like” or “becoming more like Jesus.”26

Disciple-Mentor is the individual responsible for discipling a believer (or group of believers) as the reading groups proceed through the Bible. This individual will be one already committed to biblical literacy and available to answer questions and encourage involvement.

Christians, as defined by this body of work, speaks of those individuals defined by the Evangelical belief of one that recognizes their need for salvation from sins and a heavenly reward through the work of Jesus Christ.27

Non-Christians are defined as all men and women, transgressors of God’s laws and under condemnation, who have either not heard the gospel and received Christ as their Lord and Savior, or they have heard the gospel and rejected Christ as their Lord and Savior.

R.E.A.D. is an acronym used in this body of work to define four principles found in God’s Word which describe the benefits of engaging with God’s Word. These principles will be used as

24 Woodrow Kroll, Taking Back the Good Books: How American Forgot the Bible and Why it Matters, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 58-59. Koll notes that “literacy” in this context refers to familiarity and understanding, not necessarily the ability to read and write.
27 Doctrinal statements and understandings are made in accordance with the Baptist Faith and Message as found at: http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp
guides for establishing the necessity of biblical literacy and the process through which the Disciple-Mentor will help lead the believer into Christlikeness.28

RELATE: The first process is one of revelation. It reveals the Bible is a “love letter” as it were between God and His creation. The message of the Gospel is God has restored His relationship with His creation through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ask this question as you read. Have a pen and paper nearby to take quick notes for follow-up.

- How Does the Truth of This Passage Affect My Relationship with God, Myself, and Others?

EDUCATE: The goal for the second process is one of information. What does the Bible teach? At this stage, it would be helpful, especially for young believers, or those new to reading a Bible, to understand the many different genres of the Bible. Knowing the difference between a narrative and prophesy, for example, opens the eyes of the reading to the wonderful world of the Bible and how its writers relayed their message from God to the world.

- What Does the Truth of This Passage Tell Me About God, Myself, and Others?

ADAPT: The third process leads to the goal of transformation. After all, Christlikeness is the goal for every believer. Bible reading, as the American Bible Society showed, can not only change individuals but society.

- How Does the Truth of This Passage Change How I View God, Myself and Others?

DISCIPLE: The fourth process leads to evangelization. Christ’s Great Commission makes it clear that the final goal and the ultimate reason for why the Church remains on the earth are to bring the lost to Christ and disciple them to become disciple-makers. As Bill Hull succinctly put it, “Unless the church makes making disciples its main agenda, world evangelism is a fantasy.”29 So the final question for the Bible reader to ponder as they read their Bible is:

28 R – Relate; E – Educate, A – Adapt, and D – Disciple.
• How Does the Truth of This Passage Guide Me in Following Christ?

Reading God’s Word on a regular basis will change one’s life for the better. Within its pages are found every emotion and struggle of humankind in God’s creation. There is good and evil; beauty and ugliness; music and silence; salvation and loss. The journey of reading the Bible, however, not only opens the Biblical world to the 21st-century reader but also opens up one’s heart to the value they have in God’s eyes. There is no higher purpose in opening the pages of the Bible than to see one’s self through God’s eyes. That can and will happen as the Church works to restore the value of reading God’s Word to believers and non-believers alike.

Generation Z’s are those born between 1995 and 2002. For this study, they will be identified as ages 18 – 23.

Millennials are those born between 1980 and 1994. For this study, they will be identified as ages 24 – 38.

Generation X are those born between 1966 and 1979. For this study, they will be identified as ages 39 – 53.

Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1965. For this study, they will be identified as ages 54 – 72.

Silent Generation is all those who were born before 1946. For this study, they will be identified as any age 73 and above.

Limitations and Delimitations

The stated purpose for this paper prompted the use of the tools offered by SurveyMonkey.com to develop 50 survey questions designed to provide insight into the spiritual foundations of both self-described Christians and non-Christians. While the ultimate purpose is to create a regular discipleship program that could be implemented easily in churches of every size, a secondary purpose is to get a snapshot into the belief systems of non-Christians and
American society in general. This knowledge could then jump-start the evangelistic power of the Evangelical Churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

With the availability of social media and the internet, surveys of this type offer excellent opportunities to gather data on what Americans think of the Bible. For respondents who self-identified as Christians, the survey also offers insight into the believer’s current knowledge of biblical truths and necessity of living out those truths.

SurveyMonkey’s questions were answered anonymously in hopes of obtaining genuine answers. While the nature of survey questions leaves much to be desired, as follow-up and follow-through are not available, for self-identified Christians these survey questions presented the opportunity to reveal their level of understanding of the Bible, some of its major doctrines, and the need to implement Bible study in a discipleship environment that allows for honesty, mistakes, and growth.

The Thesis Statement

Biblical illiteracy is a strong, deciding influence on the decline of the American church and its moral foundations in America. The local church can succeed in developing godliness by equipping believers to become more Christlike as they become more bibliically literate by reading God’s Word.
Chapter 2: The Need for Biblical Literacy

Literature Review

The following is a list of scriptures pertinent to this study. They emphasize both God’s commands to put His Word first place in the covenant partners life and family or the benefits of doing so.

Scriptures Regarding the Importance of Biblical Literacy

Old Testament

Deuteronomy 11:18-19 – “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

From the beginning of the established covenant with Israel, God admonished His people to learn His words through memorization and physical attachments like phylacteries. More importantly, parents were to teach His words to their children every waking moment.

Joshua 1:8 – “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

Here, God commissioned Joshua to take Moses’ place as the leader of Israel into the Land of Promise. Amid Joshua’s clear apprehension for such a task, God directed him to meditate on His word in order to be successful at what he was called to do.

Job 23:12 – “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Job’s declaration during his suffering is one for every believer today to take to heart. One must remain faithful to God’s words and treasure them above all else.
Psalm 19:8 – “The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandments of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.”

The Psalms are replete with the glories of God’s Word. Moreover, for the doubter who sees little benefit in reading and knowing God’s Word, the psalmist declared that God’s words are right and pure, bringing rejoicing and revelation.

Psalm 119:2 – “Happy are those who keep His decrees and seek Him with all their heart.”

Psalm 119 is the consummate chapter on God’s Word. It offers the lover of God’s Word the following promises as noted in these selected passages: Happiness, the promise of purity and victory over sin, strength and delight, a broadening of one’s understanding, the ability to answer the skeptic, comfort, wisdom and insight above worldly knowledge, comfort in affliction, a more sure word that is eternal, a lamp to show where we are today and a light for our path for tomorrow, and finally, protection from the enemy’s traps and snares.

Psalm 119:9-11 – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping Your word. I have sought You with all my heart; don’t let me wander from your commands. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.”

Psalm 119:24 – “Your decrees are my delight and my counselors.”

Psalm 119:28 – “I am weary from grief; strengthen me through Your word.”

Psalm 119:32 – “I pursue the way of Your commands, for You broaden my understanding.”

Psalm 119:41-42 – “Let Your faithful love come to me, Lord, Your salvation, as You promised. Then I can answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in Your word.”

Psalm 119:50 – “This is my comfort in my affliction: Your promise has given me life.”

Psalm 119:76 – “May Your faithful love comfort me as You promised your servant.”

Psalm 119:89 – “Lord, Your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven.”

Psalm 119:98-99 – “Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are always with me. I have more insight than all my teachers because Your decrees are my meditation.”
Psalm 119:100-101 – “I understand more than the elders because I obey Your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path to follow Your word.”

Psalm 119:103-104 – “How sweet Your word is to my taste – sweeter than honey in my mouth. I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore, I hate every false way.”

Psalm 119:105 – “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.”

Psalm 119:110 – “The wicked have set a trap for me, but I have not wandered from Your precepts.”

Psalm 119:130 – “The revelation of Your words brings light and gives understanding to the inexperienced.”

Psalm 119:165 – “Abundant peace belongs to those who love Your instruction; nothing makes them stumble.”

Proverbs 6:23 – “For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life.”

Mirroring Psalm 119:105, 130 this passage reminds us once again that God’s Word brings light into our world and correction to discipline us.

Isaiah 2:3 – “And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

God’s plans were never for Israel to keep His Word to themselves. The Church is to teach God’s Word to the uttermost part of the Earth.

Jeremiah 15:16 – “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight on my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD GOD of hosts.”

Jeremiah’s allegorical statement remind us that God’s Word is a joy for our heart; a wellspring of life as His Word settles into our innermost being.

New Testament

Matthew 4:4 – “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (NIV).
Jesus Christ gave the most poignant example of the power of God’s Word to overcome temptation in all forms, using it all three times Satan tempted Him in the wilderness.

**Mark 13:31** – “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

God’s Word is eternal.

**John 6:68** – “Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.’”

The religions of the world can never satisfy the hunger in one’s heart for God. Peter recognized, as all the twelve disciples, that only Jesus Christ had the Words of God that provided eternal life.

**John 14:23-24** – “Jesus answered, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my words. My Father will love Him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who doesn’t love me will not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.’”

Jesus’ promise of His eternal love, and his command to all believers to keep His words, is exemplified in one’s love for God’s Word. A real example of the professed love a believer has for God the Father, Son, and Spirit is their interaction with God’s Word.

**John 15:3** – “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

God’s Word cleanses the believer spiritually (salvation), mentally (renewing of the mind), and physically (health and healing).

**John 17:17** – “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

God’s Word makes us holy in Christ through our obedience to the truth found in His Word.

**Romans 10:17** – “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (NKJV).

The Bible says in the Old Testament that the “just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4), and in the New Testament, it is reiterated in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. The Scriptures
also say in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. If faith to please God comes from His Word, then no believer should be without His Word in their hearts or on their lips.

Romans 15:4 – “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

God’s Word produces hope and the ability to persevere through difficult times.

Ephesians 6:17 – Sword of the Spirit – “And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The Christian’s armor, as described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6, has only one offensive weapon, which is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

God’s Word, here defined by the Apostle Paul as the word of Christ, is to dwell richly within the believer. It speaks to abundance and overflowing. The result of this abundance of God’s Word in our hearts is teaching with wisdom, singing, and thankfulness.

2 Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

This passage is foundational to the Church’s understanding of God’s Word. All Scripture is inspired, God-breathed, and all of His Word is profitable for the believer: to teach, reprove, correct, and train in walking out a righteous life.

Hebrew 4:12 – “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

This passage reveals the characteristics of God’s Word over all other religious writings. God’s Word is alive and active, in both written and spoken form. His Word speaks to one’s heart and convicts, compels, and enlightens. His Word is sharper than the two-edged sword of the first
century, which in that day was one of the most formidable weapons wielded by the Roman soldier. His Word goes straight to the spirit of men and women, and to the soul of the mind, will, and emotions.

1 Peter 1:23 – “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (NASB).

Men and women are not born again by rehearsing creeds or being baptized in water. Salvation is found through God’s Word alone, which is eternal and living.

2 Peter 1:21 – “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

Man’s will or imagination did not create the prophetic words of the Bible. The prophecies of God’s Word were given to the writers of the Bible as they were moved and guided by the Holy Spirit.

1 John 2:3 – “By this, we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments.”

Obedience to God’s Word is imperative for the believer who desires God’s best. Obedience is the outward sign that one’s heart is full of God’s Word.

Published Books, Articles, Journals, and Websites

University Dissertations


Accountability is an essential and missing ingredient in the American culture on many fronts, including the Church. Archer provides some useful suggestions pertinent to this study as he recommends introducing accountability as soon as one becomes the member of a local church, then keeps the process in play through accountability-rich small groups, mentorship, and in service to the church.

Dr. Brown’s dissertation is pertinent to this project for several reasons. One, his work focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. The centrality of the Holy Spirit in every endeavor that surrounds the Word of God is important for biblical literacy.


What is the real mission of the Church? Kauffelt addresses the fact that many churches have lost focus on leading people to Christ and making disciples. As the philosophy of individualism has crept into the Church over the past half-century, many have lost sight of why the Church exists. In Chapter Three, Kauffelt asks how the Church has lost that focus. He answers by noting there are six issues. These issues include prosperity, the rebellion and exodus of young people, the ease of mobility of people today (including the ever-growing problem of believers moving from church to church), the growing liberality of doctrine, pastors who are not walking in a Christ-like manner and have abandoned their calling, and the tendency to be program-driven rather than people-driven. However, Kaufflet does not identify the lack of biblical literacy, or knowledge of Scripture in general, as a reason for the loss of focus. He does speak to getting back to the Bible as part of getting back to the basics. He says that the Church must return to the Word of God and read it with fresh eyes to rediscover the Church’s purpose. This is an encouraging statement, but Kaufflet provides little as to how to accomplish the tasks other than regurgitating many of the well-known verses. This paper will suggest that an added step is to help the Church move forward is providing the means to become regular readers of God’s Word, which, in turn, will create obedient believers.

Leach’s study was to determine if lead pastors can become more effective in increasing biblical literacy in the local church. Involving pastors and church leaders in the process of improving biblical literacy and Bible reading, in general, is a crucial element that is an expected outcome. Unfortunately, what Leach discovered is what surveys have suggested: There is a discrepancy between what pastors and church leaders believe and what their actual practices are regarding biblical literacy. The study did also provide additional relevant data regarding the usefulness of small groups. This data that can be utilized for this project in developing a useful program for implementing a biblical literacy program in the small group environment. As expected, all the surveyed pastors believed small groups were critical. However, Leach noted the pastor's responses appeared to be more from a generalization of the purpose of small groups to create an environment for interaction than a result of previous experiences by the pastors.


Jeffrey Lynn reiterates the thrust that is also behind this project: a functioning and thriving discipleship program is the biblical way for a church to grow. The next obvious question is, then “how.”\(^{30}\) Lynn answers his question by noting that a “system” is the best way, defined as “your organization’s approach to getting things done.”\(^{31}\) As Lynn recommends, a discipleship system is where God “utilizes people to help other people grow in faith, move through


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 51.
maturation stages, and then reproduce by making their disciples.”32 A primary strategy for this project will be to develop disciple-mentors in the same fashion that Lynn proposes using mature believers to help bring maturity to other believers and repeat the process.


Taylor’s dissertation contributes to this project in one significant way. In his introduction, Taylor says: “The Spirit of Christ visible and audible before men and women of our time is mandatory. It is imperative to take the Spirit of Christ inside so that He may live in each Christian.”33 The Spirit of Christ is the author of the Holy Scriptures, and thus a necessary ingredient, and participant, for the believer who longs to put the Bible back on their priority list.


A practical, successful discipleship program is at the heart of this project. Smith offers four strategies for developing disciples based on how Jesus discipled during His earthly ministry. All four are useful for any church leader who desires to see spiritual and numerical growth. For this project, three of the four are worth noting. The pastor/church leader who wants to see a return to biblical literacy and reading can utilize Smith’s gathering, small group, and mentoring strategies to great benefit.


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32 Ibid., 52.
The success of any spiritual growth project within the local church will always depend on the role of the pastor and church leadership. With that, Winchester offers what he considers essential keys to success for any spiritual leader in developing spiritual disciplines. Bible literacy, however, is not one of the keys which Winchester offers. While the keys he does suggest are undoubtedly crucial for any spiritual leader, it is disheartening to see such an important topic left on the table. Spiritual leaders must focus on developing a systematic process for Bible study and reading; otherwise, how could any layperson be expected to do so? This writer desires to show not only the necessity of adding biblical literacy to successful keys but also provide a roadmap for the pastor or church leader to follow.

Books


Michael Anthony’s book provides a necessary background to education in general, Christian education specifically. This work begins with the Old Testament narrative and takes a critical, yet a thoughtful, review of how the great empires of the past educated their citizens and passed along their knowledge. In respect to his project, Anthony shares several essential principles that can aid the Church in educating the believer in all areas. Anthony’s principles of education are focused on how “the ministry leader will be better equipped to serve his/her future ministry location…having learned some valuable lessons from those who have gone before them.”


The Barna Group’s study is essential for this project. The study took place over a six-year period, from 2011 to 2017. As a result, it provides a current picture of the attitude of Americans toward God’s Word. Also, the study reveals that the younger generations are moving away from their spiritual roots at alarming numbers, while also showing that those of Generation Z and Millennials, who self-identify as Christians, show an encouraging affinity for God’s Word. Challenges remain for those age groups, however, as the individualism of the American culture has infiltrated even the more spiritually-grounded and is quickly creating a generation who are ignorant of God’s Word. Also, they are unlikely to prioritize reading and sharing God’s Word in their lives. Barna is encouraged that two-thirds of all Americans hold an orthodox view of the Bible—that it is the inspired or actual Word of God. With that as a foundation, this project will proceed with the thesis that for the self-identified younger Christian, a program that will help them engage with God’s Word is a worthy cause.


Borg’s book, while a little less traditional than others reviewed in the project, offers some crucial distinctions in how modern language affects communication within the Christian tradition and outside Christianity as well. As he notes, “Much of its (Christianity’s) basic vocabulary is seriously misunderstood by Christians and non-Christians alike.”35 Borg’s thesis is that the many words known only among Christians affect how the World views and relates to Christianity. He notes that the different understandings deeply divide Christians in America. This can be attributed to a difference in religious background and denominations. Even in Evangelical Christianity, the message needs to be communicated in a way that ensures the listener receives

and understands it, with a commitment to act on the message. Biblical illiteracy is undoubtedly a contributing factor, as many in today’s churches depend on the pastor/teacher to correctly interpret Scripture for the laity. The importance of getting the everyday believer to re-engage with God’s Word becomes more and more critical with each passing year.


Along with Bill Hull’s book, Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey’s book on discipleship is a helpful guide for leading the believer on the path of fulfillment in discovering and walking out God’s plans for the Church. Early and Dempsey’s foundation builds its message on Matthew 28:18-20. Christ calls the Church to make disciples, and in the 4th part of the book, Dr. Dempsey discusses the importance of leadership and notes the need for developing and enabling believers to become what God called them to become (i.e., more Christ-like). Therefore, the central task of the Christian leader “is to encourage, equip, and empower individuals to grow and become what God intends them to be.”36 With that in mind, the pastor and church leader must incorporate biblical literacy in any discipleship program that takes God’s command seriously to make disciples.


Edwards book would not be considered an evangelical work by most readers. While her work discusses the need for biblical literacy, it does so by comparing such literacy with popular culture and media (such as movies like Russell Crowe’s *Noah* or Ridley Scott’s *Exodus: Gods and Kings*). While her arguments are valid to a point, that having some biblical knowledge helps

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the individual understand its references to modern societal narratives, her argument sides with those who disbelieve the spiritual nature of the Bible and its Creator-Author. Contributing authors begin with biblical illiteracy in Ireland, a mostly Catholic society whose traditions hold as much sway as biblical truth, and end with a mocking narrative of Noah’s Ark. The definition of biblical literacy was evangelical for the most part, but the conclusions drawn did little to convince a non-Christian readership that knowing and reading the Bible can alter the course of one’s life and change it for eternity. It is undoubtedly true that any discussion on the importance of biblical literacy is a good discussion. The challenges come, however, when those advocating such literacy are merely interested in stories and not the God of the Bible.


Eswine addresses the questions any committed pastor has probably asked themselves: “Could I reach the person I once was (before salvation)”. By that, Eswine means that every pastor is a human who once was a child who had to grow up, with a story mixed with heartache and jubilation. Every pastor has prayed incorrectly, daydreamed about another life, longed for things that might now embarrass or may have hurt someone. Moreover, God still found them. Pastors are crucial to any discipleship program, especially one that wants to encourage believers to re-engage with God’s Word. How would the pastor accomplish that task? While there are some suggestions in this project, the pastor must commit himself to design messages and speak to the hearts of believers and move them to change. Eswine’s thoughts offer some great ideas. He defines a “post-everything” world as one that is full of multiple contexts and cultural

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assumptions. From science to pop culture to relationships, a pastor’s heart must be committed to the cause for anything of value to succeed.


The history of biblical literacy in America is an integral part of laying the foundation for this project. As such, the American Bible Society’s (ABS) role is integral in understanding America’s interaction with God’s Word. In this work, Fea quotes Roy Peterson (the President of the ABS at the writing of this book) about his decision in re-evaluating how ABS will function in the 21st century. Peterson noted his concern “how the power structures of our culture – government, media, and education – have led us down a path towards secularization. He mentions the ‘radical attack’ on religious liberty, the decline of a Christian worldview among young people in the United States, and the destruction of the traditional family … the only way to rescue the United States…is by getting more and more Americans engaged with the Bible.”38 Peterson’s observations mirror the thesis for this project as a way forward is sought to bringing Christians and the Bible back together.


Hammett’s work speaks to some concerns today’s pastor must address in keeping the local church growing and effective in its ministry. For this project, Hammett’s contribution centers around his chapter on “Bible Study for Twenty-first-Century Adults.” First, Hammett notes that the traditional model of Bible study in the local church is no longer valid. He sees

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“life-transforming Bible study…outside of the church facilities,” with a focus on the catalyst for deeper relationships and accountability.³⁹ Facing the many challenges of relational discipleship, Hammett sees successful Bible study (and for our purposes Bible reading as well) happening in several ways. One, it must be decentralized, as noted earlier that the church building is no longer the only place to place to meet. Second, it must be digitized. That is, with the promulgation of media option, a Disciple-Mentor has a myriad of ways to keep believers accountable and, more importantly, in touch. Third, it must be customized. For the success of the 26-Week Bible Study program offered in this project, meeting individual and small group needs will be crucial.


Along with Dave Earley’s book, Hull’s is a helpful book on Discipleship. He begins his introduction with a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”⁴⁰ Hull offers reliable biblical instructions on the need for discipleship, the path for discipleship, and its transformational aspects. Relevant to this project is the Stages of Discipleship which Hull discusses in Chapter Six. Utilizing both Robert Coleman’s eight steps and Rick Warren’s Diamond of Discipleship, Hull speaks to the need for discipleship to be both sequential and segmented. That is, disciples must move from one step to another and see progress. Moreover, disciples must see a purpose in each phase. These two aspects are a part of the 26-Week program developed here.


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Both of Kinnaman’s books, *You Lost Me* and *UnChristian*, are essential additions to this project for several reasons. In *You Lost Me*, Kinnaman notes that more than half of all Christian teens and twentysomethings leave active involvement in church as soon as they are able.\(^{41}\) In *UnChristian*, Kinnaman notes that the apparent hypocrisy, judgmentalism, and cultural distance of the Church as stated reasons non-believers are not interested in Christianity are. In other words, while the Church has been busy taking care of its own, we have lost touch with those we are to be most concerned about—the lost. How this relates to this project is two-fold. It is the belief of this writer that God’s Word holds the key to any individual’s experience with God, and when the Church restores its love for God’s Word by actively reading it and encourages non-believers to do the same, the Creator-Author will reveal Himself, both to the hungry and the lost. Several of Kinnaman’s observations were used to develop the process for this project.


Dr. Kroll’s works were the spark that started this project. These two books, *Back to the Bible* and *Taking Back the Good Book*, are foundational for this process and project for several reasons. In *Back to the Bible*, Dr. Kroll admonishes the Church to not accommodate the World’s choices as our own. Instead, he calls on the Church to be the alternative to the world. That is, the Church must not turn away from the truth of God’s Word. This 21\(^{st}\) century Church should

“present a clear alternative to the postmodern world [and] … stand in contradistinction to the subjectivity of the world and say, ‘This is truth.’”

A clarion call to restore the Bible to its proper place in the lives of believers will restore that truth to its rightful place.

In *Taking Back the Good Book*, Dr. Kroll answers some crucial questions about the purpose of God’s Word and the effect of Bible illiteracy on one’s life. One, Bible illiteracy leaves life’s most important questions unanswered, such as how does one know the truth? Or does God really exists? And if God exists why is there evil in the world? The younger generations, who are already suffering from a lack of biblical literacy, seek the answers to these questions in the wrong places, such as religions, social environments, drugs, and relationships. The Church has the power of God’s Word available to share but have sat on that power for too long.


In this work, Barna defines discipleship as a “lifelong process and journey rooted in a relationship with Jesus.” Within the surveys, less than 40% of Christians polled said they were either where they wanted to be, or were happy, in their spiritual life. Overall only 20% of Christians are involved in discipleship activity, and among the obstacles both church leaders and laity said were at the root of less spiritual growth, “busyness” was at the top. The data presented offers tremendous insight into those leaders willing to learn why their church may not be growing. If there is one area that needs improvement with many churches, it is with

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45 Ibid., 57.
discipleship. Since that is the primary calling Jesus gave the Church at His ascension, it also reveals a terrible truth among evangelicals. If restoring the primacy of Bible literacy and reading will happen, churches must also return to the original call to make disciples. Barna’s work helps to provide a roadmap for that effort.


Willard’s introduction notes that communication with God is a two-way street, and in one’s ongoing friendship with God, we tell Him what is on our heart, and He tells us what is on His. How does one know they are hearing from God? Willard notes that one must be fully engaged in the Kingdom of God, and that our desire to hear from Him must be “overwhelmed by and lost in our worship and adoration of Him.” In Chapter Six, “The Word of God and the Rule of God,” Willard looks at the role God’s Word should play in one’s everyday life, looking at Psalm 19:1-6 and 119:89-91. Chapter Eight, “Recognizing the Voice of God,” Willard looks at hearing God in Scripture, studying 1 Chronicles 14:8-17. His simple premise is that one knows they are hearing from God when that word corresponds with the words or meanings found in the Bible, consistent with sound interpreted biblical teaching. Relying on God’s Word to hear His voice is a crucial for those who long to hear from God and for understanding of this project.


In Ms. Wray’s introduction, she reaches the similar conclusion of other scholars that while many in America admire and believe the Bible to be the actual Word of God, most do not

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read or study it. Utilizing the Gallup poll noted in this project, Wray points out that 78% of those polled either believe the Bible to be the actual Word of God or inspired by God. Wray concludes that if many Americans hold the Bible in such high esteem, but do not read it, then for many the Bible is more of a symbol of faith, like the cross or other religious icons.

Wray’s work makes several significant contributions to this project. Wray declares her desire to help Christians rediscover God’s Word throughout her book. It is a desire that many pastors and leaders need to re-acquire. Her suggestion for tools, while overwhelming for the beginner, are worthy goals for any believer. Second, the remainder of her book provides a basis for the 26-Week Biblical Literacy Discipleship program that is part of this project.

### Journal Articles/Web Pages


Gourlay’s article is pertinent to this project as Evangelicals are the target group for encouraging and leading Christians to re-engage the Bible. Gourlay quotes the Barna study at the beginning, that will be addressed throughout this project, noting that America is “a nation of biblical illiterates whose worldview, ideology, cosmology, and theology are internally inconsistent. We are morally vacuous and intellectually threadbare – and the problem is only getting worse.”

Gourlay’s research focused on Bible knowledge among adults 18 years and older, in randomly selected churches, who were Sunday School participants. Of the four research questions Gourlay evaluated, two of the questions examined whether the size and longevity of attendance, Sunday School classes had a positive impact on the participants Bible knowledge. In the end, age and length of participation were found to have minimal effect on one’s Bible

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knowledge. In fact, with all four questions, Gourlay’s study shows those answering correctly were around 65%, which is a failing grade in most educational environments. The results show that biblical illiteracy is a concern even among Evangelicals who have historically been the most biblically-accurate in their doctrine.


Grayston writes that the significant gaps found among non-Christians today are becoming more prevalent among Christians today also. He notes several reasons for this decline. Among them, he notes the credibility gap towards the Bible due to the wide dissemination of critical scholarship. The lack of respect towards authority among the younger generations has spilled into religion as well. In Today’s world, the mantra is often repeated that “This is my truth, now tell me yours.” Relevance is undoubtedly an aspect for many, because the lack of biblical literacy has led to a lack of understanding of how God’s Word can change and affect one’s life for the better. Finally, lifestyle and reading patterns have changed in society to the point where many believe, even if it is an erroneous belief, that they are too busy or do not care to read. His article contributes to this project as his contributions move forward the dialogue of the importance of reading the Bible, and how the Church historically has progressed with regards to reading the Scriptures.


One result of the study The Barna Group found in *The Bible in America* was the claim by some that the Bible is no longer relevant in the 21st century. Havea asks if there is a place in the

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postmodern world for ancient texts, where the situations are “radically different” from the times of their writing. Is the postmodern world able to accommodate the Bible? Focusing on the two “pulls” of postmodernity (“scary and fun”), Havea spends a majority of the article pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of today’s world. The postmodern world should not be of concern to the Christian or their Bible, Havea notes. Instead, it forces the believer to come to terms with issues that, at times, seem a paradox. As she says, “Postmodernity reminds us that we occupy both real and ideological spaces that continually unravel . . . and thus, we find meaning in the fray.”

While Havea’s postmodern theology is quite apparent, there are still several useful observations on the importance of reading a book that has weathered the changing times and allowing the narrative of Scripture to give the reader an eternal perspective.


Larson’s area of expertise is in nineteenth-century British history. In his studies he concluded it was impossible to fully understanding the extent of influence on the Victorian culture that the Scriptures held, or how much of society was shaped by the shared knowledge of the Bible. He uses several people for his examples, although they are on opposite ends of the spectrum. One is Catherine Mumford, who eventually became Catherine Booth. While Catherine did not receive any formal education until she was twelve, her testimony was that the Bible was her constant companion, and she began reading it by age five; she had read it eight times by the age of twelve. Larson’s 2nd example was Charles Bradlaugh, Victorian Britain’s most famous atheist. Bradlaugh’s early education was “steeped in Scripture,” and all that has survived of his

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work is explicitly biblical. While one may argue that some of Larson’s claims show that biblical literacy does not guarantee a life full of God, it does show that even those who were not believers respected God’s Word enough to be knowledgeable of it.


Merwe analyzed the role of reading Scripture in several significant parts of Christian history, with the goal of demonstrating that believer’s should seek to add Scripture reading into their lives. As the vision of this project seeks the transformation of the reader, so Merwe suggests that “the influence of the Word of God transforms the subjectivity of the reader.”

That is the promise of Romans 12:2 becomes a reality as one incorporates the Word of God into their daily life. Believer’s minds are renewed, and the power of God’s Word transforms them.


Dr. Stack-Nelson’s article offers useful corroboration of the thesis for this project. As a Seminary professor who has taught both graduate and undergraduate classes on the Bible, she became concerned, as did some of her co-workers, that students who completed her classes knew more about the Bible, but had not become better readers of the Bible. Noting how many students became dependent on others telling them what to believe, Stack-Nelson wants to create students of the Bible she calls “readerly readers,” or those who simply read the Scriptures better, so that it produces transformation. A characteristic of these type of readers includes a disciplined

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imagination. A readerly reader is one that has an imagination that looks for connections between passages and cultural elements that add flavor. Disciplined reading is also required as one focuses their imagination to the text at hand. “Working within this tension of disciplined attention to the text and imaginative openness to new connections is a . . . characteristic of the readerly reader.”


The authors address the issue that including biblical studies in one’s liberal arts education is both pertinent and necessary. While there are several topics to consider, such as whether to teach the Four-Source Theory and differences in the Gospels or just the teachings of Jesus, the student learning outcomes (SLO) should, at the very minimum, be designed with a focus on life after college. In that sense, being biblical literate is a worthy goal for any liberal education.

**Theological Foundations**

**The Bible is God’s Special Revelation and Discerner of Men’s Hearts**

Hebrews 4:12-13: For the Word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. CSB

The author of Hebrews has written what one scholar calls “a rhapsody on God’s penetrating word.” This passage alludes to the Old Testament description of God’s Word found in Psalm 95, which emphasizes God’s voice that His followers should hear (v. 7). Guthrie notes that first-century Judaism and early Christianity believed the Word of God to be a “creative,

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54 Ibid., 295.
administrating, and judging force, which at times was personified.” Several essential aspects of
this passage pertinent to this project include the reference to God’s Word being “living and
active” (“effective” in the CSB) and a “sword.” God’s Word is not dead. It is alive and powerful
and changes people’s lives as they ingest it spiritually. “Active” speaks to God’s Word carrying
out His plans. That same spoken word is what brought creation into existence in Genesis 1, and
is “dynamic, interactive, and transforming” as it interacts with the people of God.

Another description of God’s Word is as a “sword.” That imagery reveals that “God’s
word is a word of promise to those who would enter God’s rest, [and] it is also a discerning word
of judgment.” That sword, wielded in the hand of a trained believer, can change the course of
history (Luther is a perfect example). God’s sword penetrates past the peripherals of outward
display and cuts deep, reaching deep into a person’s life where no one other than God Himself
can go.

Hebrews 4:13 shows the extent of God’s discerning word. Nothing is hidden from Him.
The passage speaks to the “complete inability to hide anything from God’s gaze . . . [they] are
spiritually naked.” Indeed when the believer allows the Word to do its part, then the believer is
made into the “image of Christ,” as God has intended since eternity.

There is more to God’s revelation to humankind than just the outwardly, natural world as
well. While Psalm 19 and Romans 1 speak of God’s general revelation (Psalm 19 says “the
heavens declare the glory of God,” and the works of His hands “communicate knowledge,” and
their “message has gone out to the whole earth”), God’s special revelation includes His written
word. Millard Erickson says that God’s special revelation mean’s “God’s manifestation of

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56 Ibid., 156.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.” Erickson notes that the 2nd (after historical events) modality of special revelation is God’s speech where throughout the Scripture we are told “The word of the Lord” came either through the prophet or the written word.

The first result of special revelation must always be knowledge of God; knowledge of His person, His acts and creation, and His plan of salvation through Christ. If revelation includes what Erickson calls “propositional truths” (i.e., a proposition about God need not be impersonal), then that propositional truth can be preserved, and thus the preserved word itself is then also revelation truth. It can be written down or inscripturated. If revelation as we understand it is not just the actual occurrence, but the revealing of that occurrence, then the Bible is itself a revelation from God.

The Bible is the Inspired and Inerrant Word of God for the Church and Believer

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

What does it mean to say the Bible is inspired by God and profitable to believers? Paul Enns says that inspiration “is necessary to preserve the revelation of God.” Therefore, the inspiration of Scripture “guarantees the accuracy of the revelation.” A fuller understanding of inspiration and its importance to the believer is that the Holy Spirit “overshadowed” the writers “so that while writing according to their styles and personalities, the result was God’s Word written – authoritative, trustworthy, and free from error in the original autographs.”

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61 Ibid., 212.
62 Ibid., 221.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
Today it is also vital, and necessary, to understand the evangelical concept of the inerrancy of Scripture. This has become necessary because of the corruption of the terms “inspiration, infallible, and even inerrant” by those who deny that the Bible is free from error.\textsuperscript{66} Inerrancy is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all its teachings.\textsuperscript{67} The 1978 International Council on Biblical Inerrancy said the following:

\begin{quote}
Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

The doctrine of inerrancy is a valuable tool for encouraging and guiding believers into a more personal relationship with God. The believer’s commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture can also aid in bringing the non-believer to the table to experience God’s Word in all its glory and a revelation of the offer of salvation through Christ. Without inerrancy, the Bible is just another book of teachings and, in fact, can be brushed away as Barna says many of Generation Z and Millennials are now doing. This writer hopes to find a path that will restore many to a foundational and lively faith in God’s Word by discipleship and consistent reading. The doctrines of Inspiration and Inerrancy are essential, foundational, truths for that purpose.

\textbf{Theoretical Foundations}

Throughout Scripture, the foundational truths of God’s Word rely on several crucial assumptions. In Joshua 1:8, after God promotes Joshua to replace Moses and lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land, Joshua is promised that by meditation and obedience to the book of the law, day and night, his path would be prosperous and successful. That is, his call to conquer the Promised Land and establish the nation of Israel in God’s name would succeed. Meditation

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Ibid., 168.
\item[67] Erickson, 246.
\item[68] Enns, 169.
\end{footnotes}
(by definition a constant contemplation) and obedience are the commands by God that would lead to Joshua’s success. The Psalmist declared the value of God’s Word, calling it perfect, sure, right, pure, and enlightening (Psalm 19:7-8). The Apostle Paul said God’s Word is inspired and profitable to establish doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

When the Bible is read consistently and studied regularly, its influence increases and changes the lives of its readers. While others believe in the viability of biblical literacy, however, they are not looking for a spiritual experience to connect them with God, but rather a literary connection with history. As will be seen later, however, Bible literacy contributed to the foundation of America and to early revivals. Both truths lay the groundwork for the importance of this project’s results.

This writer faces a number of challenges in designing a discipleship program that incorporates Bible study and guidance on the daily reading of the Bible. Of course, as Barna shows in his studies and will be corroborated by this writer’s survey, the majority of Americans are biblically illiterate or unconcerned that a lack of Bible knowledge affects their daily lives and relationships. A major hurdle will be to assist pastors and church leaders in restoring their relationship with God’s Word, then provide them with the knowledge and skills to better equip their members and outsiders who become convinced that biblical literacy is a worthy goal.

While current academic research continues to reveal the lack of biblical literacy and its effect on American Christianity, there is very little in the way of a path to lead leaders and laity to an intimate experience with God’s Word. Does the Church sacrifice some of its historical, doctrinal stances in order to attract non-believers and ambivalent Christians who are on the verge, or have already left the Church? This project hopes to open new doors for biblical literacy,
and more importantly, lead believers to daily experiences in reading God’s Word for a lifetime of growth and joy.
Chapter 3: Biblical Literacy Since the Early Church

The Scriptures available to the 21st century Christian had a difficult and challenging road. Since the first century, and even before with the creation and acceptance of the Old Testament, God’s Word made an eternal impact on those who trusted, believed, and acted on it. Throughout the history of the Church, the Word of God in its present form of sixty-six books has been venerated or berated, yet it still holds its position as the bestselling book of all time. Since the first-century, men and women have given their lives so that others could have God’s Word in their own language. What could cause such sacrifice for just a centuries-old book? And why should anyone today take the Bible seriously and not just view it as historical fiction?

The history of the Church itself is one of triumph and bloodshed. When one looks into that history, can there be any confidence that the Bible in its present form is what God intended? What of those past leaders who were clearly motivated by greed for power and money, but held control over the Church? Today there are many who refuse to recognize the validity of the Gospel message because of the sins of the past. Joseph Early says of observations he has made as a church historian that writing the history of Christianity has proved:

to be more difficult than I had expected … Throughout Christian history, there have been incidents and even entire eras where church leaders appeared to place personal objectives over what God has depicted in Scripture. To achieve his goals, man often construed Christianity to fit his own purpose. These are eras when man has attempted to make God in his own image. During these times, Christian leaders attempted to make the church organization more powerful than the gospel. As a historian, I am often asked where God was during these times. After twenty years of rumination, I believe the answer is that God was present all the time calling man and the church back to the Bible.69

Early points out that over the course of church history humankind has seen bad things happen when “man ignores or minimizes Scripture and instead relies on power, tradition, and the

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government. Many church leaders acted purely in their own selfish interests, but others believed they were doing what was necessary and best for the church...the ends justified the means.  

Indeed, throughout history, Scripture has held a central role as the catalyst for change.

**Biblical Literacy in the Early Church**

**The Apostles and the Early Church Fathers**

The Gospels

Sean Freyne discussed the different views on how the Gospels came to be and their influence on the Early Church in his contribution: “Early Christian Imagination and the Gospel.” The Gospel writer was to bring from his treasure both “the old and the new (Mt. 13:51).” Jesus’ message was something new compared to what Jewish teachers offered. For instance, The Gospels record in Jesus’ teachings this phrase “but I say” fifteen times, twelve of which occur in Matthew alone. Rudolph Bultmann spoke of the uniqueness of the gospels, noting that the synoptic gospels began as oral material shaped in the context of early Christian faith and worship. But that while some of the material should be “compared with extra-biblical parallels from the surrounding culture, any such comparison . . . serves only to throw the uniqueness of the gospels into stronger relief.” For Bultmann, this unique collection of writings was not a new literary genre (he did believe John’s gospel alone was the exception), but was unique because of its content. Freyne does admit that Bultmann wrote from a theological, not a literary perspective.

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70 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
But Jesus’ teachings also reiterated much of the Jewish culture and teachings that aligned with his new narrative. He did, after all, declare the beginning of his ministry in a synagogue:

“And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth…and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read … the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me…’”

The Apostle’s View of Their Writings as Scripture

Did the Apostles have a sense that their writings were inspired by God and should be considered God’s Word like the Old Testament? There are several passages that suggest this. In 1 Timothy 5:18 the Apostle Paul says, “For the Scripture says: ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages” (CSB). The first quote is found in Deut 25:4 and twice in Paul’s writings, here in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians 9:9. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} quote is not found in the Old Testament but is found in Luke 10:7. The Apostle Paul considered his friend and traveling partner’s, Doctor Luke, writings as Scripture.

The more famous passage is Peter’s proclamation that Paul’s writings were Scripture.

“Also, regarding the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given him. He speaks about these things in all his letters. There are some matters that are hard to understand. The untaught and unstable will twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures”.

While Peter had some confrontations with Paul regarding Jewish law and Gentiles (see Gal 2:11-14), Peter realized Paul’s theology and writings were from God.

\textsuperscript{75} Luke 4:15-18a, KJV.
\textsuperscript{76} 2 Peter 3:15-16 CSB.
Paul declared his writings to be inspired by God and thus Scripture. To the Corinthians, Paul said, “If any man thinks himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments\textsuperscript{77} of the Lord.\textsuperscript{78}

The Early Church

The early Church Fathers laid the critical groundwork on the value of God’s Word and its divine inspiration, especially by defining essential doctrines in the face of heresy in the early centuries. Christopher Hall noted that the “first five hundred years of the church’s life were a period of intense biblical and theological ferment, reflection and development.”\textsuperscript{79} Much of the theological writings of the first few centuries were to refute heresies that had arisen and threatened to water down the Scriptures. Why were some documents considered authoritative for the church and others were not? What was the source of this authority?\textsuperscript{80}

Hall notes the reasons for studying the church fathers include first, \textit{close hermeneutical proximity} to the biblical writers, particularly the New Testament. Second, early church fathers help us to understand the roots of our faith. Third, most of the early church fathers wrote and lived as pastors. Thus they “wrote to help people come to grips with the teaching of Christ. As far as I know…theology was not seen as a profession or occupation [but]…concomitant of pastoral care.”\textsuperscript{81} And fourth, \textit{Ecclesiastical approval}. The Church itself affirmed what the fathers taught and believed.

\textsuperscript{77} Gr: \textit{entole} – an authoritative prescription or injunction
\textsuperscript{78} 1 Corinthians 14:37 KJV.
\textsuperscript{79} Christopher A. Hall, \textit{Learning Theology with the Church Fathers} (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2002), 15.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{81} Christopher A. Hall, \textit{Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers}, (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1998), 55.
In Justin Martyr’s writings, he often referred to the Scriptures and their validity in the life of the believer. In Chapter IX of his Dialogue with Trypho, Martyr pointed out to the recipient of his letter that “you know not what you say, but have been persuaded by teachers who do not understand the Scriptures, and you speak, like a diviner, whatever comes into your mind…I shall prove to you…that we have not believed empty fables or words without foundation but words filled with the Spirit of God, and big with power, and flourishing with grace.”

Irenaeus was an important person in early Church history as he responded to the Gnostic threats regarding the Bible and divine revelation in the 2nd century. The Gnostics posed a threat to Christianity because they believed in secret knowledge that was not available to all believers, and in many cases in direct contradiction to the doctrines of the early church. The Gnostics taught that this secret knowledge was handed down to them from the apostles themselves in both oral and written form.

Irenaeus, writing in the latter half of the 2nd century, “Strongly asserted the authority of the Scripture against his Gnostic opponents.” Irenaeus noted, “They tell us, however…that this knowledge has not been openly divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Savior through means of parables to those qualified for understanding it.” Diodore, a bishop of Tarsus (d. ca. 390 AD), was a church father in the spirit of Antioch exegesis who emphasized the contemplative interpretation of Scripture. In his prologue to his

82 Justin Martyr is referencing several New Testament passages from the Apostle Paul, thus ascribing to the New Testament writings divinely-inspired Scripture status, as Paul reminded his readers that the Gospel was not to be compared to “fables and endless genealogies” (1Tim 1:4). See also 1Tim 1:7; 2Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14 and 2Pet 1:16.


84 Hall, Learning Theology with the Church Fathers, 207.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 207-08.
commentary on Psalms that “Scripture teaches what is useful, exposes what is sinful, corrects what is deficient, and thus it completes the perfect human being.”

**The Early Church Councils and Biblical Literacy**

The importance of understanding the councils of the early church cannot be overstated. While it is undoubtedly true that many of the issues did not directly involve biblical literacy, the truth is that a general understanding of history and how evangelical Christianity and the Bible came to be is an essential task for today’s church. The councils were a necessity. Where would the Church be today without the defense made by the early fathers of orthodox Christianity, on what the Bible teaches concerning Christ and the Trinity, and the authorized canon?

Understanding these Councils offers the opportunity for today’s believer to realize the sacrifices made to ensure what many today take for granted. Specifically, in regards to this project, what kind of opposition did the early church fathers face, and how did they respond? The great fathers of the faith helped to ensure that the Bible in its form today forms the foundation of evangelical Christianity in the 21st century.

James Kelhoffer notes that some of those in attendance at the Council of Nicaea were called “confessors.” They had suffered physical torture and loss of a limb for not denying Christ during the persecution of the Church before Constantine. There is some controversy over the extent of influence confessors had over the resulting Nicene Creed. They were, nevertheless leaders who held the respect of their peers. Although Kelhoffer does not believe there is sufficient evidence of the influence of confessors at Nicaea, he does admit that several were reportedly in attendance at Nicaea. Fifth-century author Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote that Paul of

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87 Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 158.
89 e.g. see Matt 5:11, 44; Romans 8:35; 2 Timothy 1:8; James 5:13; and 1 Peter 5:9.
Neocaesarea “had suffered from the frantic rage of Licinius. Both of his hands had been bound, and when a red-hot iron was applied to them, the locomotive nerves of the joints were . . . rendered dead.”

Theodoret and Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411 AD), mention a Paphnutius of Egypt who was: “maimed . . . [and] performed miracles and Constantine honored his suffering.”

Paphnutius was a bishop who suffered under Maximinus by having his right eye gouged out, his left leg cut off at the knee, and condemned to the mines. Whether confessors had a significant influence on the outcome of Nicaea or not, their presence was another witness to the high regard the early fathers held of their faith in God’s Word.

Arianism and the Council of Nicaea

The Arians had erred by reading Scripture poorly, seen in their failure to distinguish between what was proper to the Son’s deity and to the Son’s humanity. In their case, the failure to understand the relationship between the two had led them to deny the deity of the Son. Or, as Athanasius puts it, “looking at what is human in the Saviour [sic], they have judged Him a creature.” Other heretics would make the opposite error and deny the genuineness of the Sons’ humanity. Both fail to grasp who Christ is because of a failure to read Scripture in line with what the gospel itself demands if salvation is to be accomplished.

The Arian controversy is possibly one of the most well-known heresies in the early centuries of the Church. For the purposes of this project, there are several important notes to be made. Arius and his followers were well-educated leaders in the fourth-century Church. Bible illiteracy was not the issue, but rather the interpretation of Scripture. And while the early church fathers were sympathetic towards Scripture as the foundation of the faith, they also relied on extra-biblical sources and interpretation of language to solve doctrinal issues. Arianism is one

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90 Kelhoffer, 592.
91 Ibid., 593.
92 Ibid.
93 Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 64.
example as the doctrinal division of the divinity of Christ between the Western and Eastern Church. It rested solely on the use of *homoiousios* (“of a similar substance”) and *homoousios* (“of the same substance”). Arius’ famous phrase was “there was (once) when Christ was not.”

Arius believed that Christ was the first created being from God the Father, of the highest order, but not part of a “Godhead.” The orthodox church’s refutation of Arius in the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), relied on the use of a non-biblical word, *homoousios*, to declare that Christ was indeed God.

The council adopted the word *homoosuis* in order to eliminate Arian teaching, as well as to affirm that Jesus Christ was fully God, sharing in some way the same divine nature as the Father... A word not found in Scripture was considered necessary because the Arians interpreted every scriptural phrase in accordance with their teaching, but in a way that the majority felt was inconsistent with the intended meaning of Scripture.

In the same vein, it is interesting to note that as the church fathers used a non-biblical word to refute Arianism, Arius used presuppositions that included extra-biblical philosophies in coming to his conclusion that Christ could not be God. His first presupposition was that the divine essence was an indivisible entity, and as such God could not divide Himself into a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Khaled Anatolios wrote that the participants in the Nicene Council, while dealing with several critical doctrinal differences concerning the divinity of Christ, did approach the discussion with some fundamental, foundational beliefs pertinent to this project. There was a general agreement on the “contents of the scriptural canon, its normativity as the prime source of divine revelation, and the attribution of its ultimate authorship to the Holy Spirit.”

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94 Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 193.
95 Ibid., 195.
leaders of the church of the 4th century agreed that apostolic tradition should lay the foundation for interpretation. Also, the primacy of faith and faith-based reason were shared beliefs for reaching an agreed solution. And though both sides considered themselves the voice of reason, it should be noted that the literal interpretation of Scripture oftentimes left the door open for misinterpretation by Arianists, Modalists, and others.

It is also worth noting that all those involved accepted the Trinity as an essential foundation for the Christian faith. It was the understanding of the relations between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that brought about the crisis, which led to the council. All those involved affirmed and verbalized the lordship of Christ in worship, even though the question was how one interpreted that worship. The biblical titles attributed to Christ presented additional challenges even as the Arians were compelled to explain how those titles applied to Christ.98

The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)

At issue in the Council of Constantinople was the two natures of Christ: humanity and divinity. One protagonist was Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria (AD 412 to 444). The antagonist was Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who was described by one contemporary historian as a “firebrand” over his pursuit of heretics.99 While Cyril disagreed with Nestorius’ theology, both proved their faithfulness to Christ and the Church; they professed their desire to be in unity, while also deriding any sense of heresy that denied the truth of the Incarnation and salvation through Christ.100

Cyril’s theological arguments against Nestorius were not only to defend the God-man who came to earth and took on human flesh. They were also to defend the purposes of the

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98 Ibid., 48.
99 Hall, Learning Theology with the Church Fathers, 86.
100 Ibid., 87-8.
Incarnation itself. “For what did the Word become incarnate? ‘For this end, that by the likeness that the Word born of God had with us, the law of sin in the members of our flesh could be condemned, and so that in the likeness of the death of the one who knew not death, death might be destroyed.”” 101

Harold O. J. Brown summarized what was at stake when he noted three fundamental questions regarding Jesus’ deity and humanity. First, “was God born of Mary or only a man?” Second, “did God die on the cross or only a man?” Third, “should the human nature of Christ be worshipped?” 102 And though the heresy of Arianism was supposedly dealt with at Nicaea, Jared Bryant notes that the time between the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople was very active in determining orthodoxy, and of the fifty-three councils that were held during this time, sixteen took place for the distinct purpose of addressing Arianism. 103

With the Council of Constantinople (381 AD), there were additions to the Nicene Creed that implicitly rejected the classification of Christ and the Holy Spirit on the level of God’s creation. It also “rejects the idea that at the end of time, Christ and the Spirit will lose their proper characteristics.” 104 Below is a side-by-side comparison between the Nicene and Constantinople creeds (declarations from Scripture are italicized).

### Comparing the Creeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Creed of Nicaea, 325 AD</th>
<th>The Creed of Constantinople, 381 AD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We believe in one <em>God, the Father, Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible</em>. And in one <em>Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten</em>, that</td>
<td>We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, and in one <em>Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God</em>,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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101 Ibid., 90-1. See Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:55; 1 John 3:8.
102 Ibid., 87.
begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came in existence; who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, sits on the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there will be no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, exerting lordship and spending life, who proceeds from the Father, who is glorified and worshipped together with the Father and the Son; Who spoke through the prophets; in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.\textsuperscript{105}

The Biblical Canon

Athanasius (296-373), Bishop of Alexandria, was in the habit every year of sending a letter to the churches in his diocese, giving them the date that Easter would be celebrated that year. In 367 AD, his thirty-ninth \textit{Festal Letter}, he included a discussion on the biblical canon that included the first listing of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament that the Church has today.\textsuperscript{106} His \textit{Festal Letter} is considered one of the essential documents in the history of the Christian Bible for that very reason.\textsuperscript{107} Soon after, the councils of North Africa at Hippo (393

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 124.
AD), and Carthage (397 AD) published the same list. Faithful to Athanasius’s calling as a defender of the faith, not only does the letter contain the biblical canon as it now is, but he also used the letter to continue his debate against those he considered “impious” and “heretics.”

Athanasius used this letter to not only establish a biblical canon but also to refute those who claimed other works as canonical. Two themes garnered most of his attention. One was the irrelevance and danger of human teachers. “The Word of God is the only true Teacher – after all, he is Truth itself…The Word’s truth is to be found completely and plainly in the Scriptures, and so there is no need to seek it in other books or from other teachers.”

The 2nd theme was that no apocryphal books actually came from those who supposedly wrote them (e.g., Isaiah, Moses, Enoch, and other Old Testament prophets). In an earlier Festal Letter, Athanasius discussed the differences between “the words of the saints” and “the fancies of human invention… only the New Testament authors transmit the teachings of the Word ‘without alteration,’ and thus ‘of these the Word wants us to be disciples…” In one clear refutation against Arias’ claim that Jesus was created, Athanasius says: “For it is just like the request for Barabbas to say that the Son of God is a creature, and that there was a time when he was not.”

Athanasius began his argument for the canon in par. 16 of his Festal Letter, likening himself to Luke’s desire to set in order the narrative of Jesus. Athanasius’s desire was to set in order the Old and New Testament biblical canon, apart from the “so-called apocryphal books and to mix these with divinely inspired Scripture, laying his foundation for the choices based on “those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and assistants,” (e.g. Mark and Luke) “of the

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109 Brakke, 48.
110 Ibid., 51.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 59
Word handed down to our ancestors.”\textsuperscript{113} It is important to note that Athanasius’s conviction of the divine inspiration of those books in his list was not just of his choosing. His conviction goes far beyond a rational decision based on facts and ventures into the vital realm of faith for the believer.\textsuperscript{114} This is an essential consideration in today’s world as evangelicals must defend the faith and the claim of inspiration and inerrancy against a host of doubters. Athanasius’s list of the New Testament is as follows:

Again, one should not hesitate to name the books of the New Testament. For these are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; then after these, Acts of the Apostles and seven letters, called catholic, by the apostles, namely: one by James; two by Peter; then three by John; and after these, one by Jude. After these there are fourteen letters by Paul, written in this order: first to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; and after these, to the Galatians; and next to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians and to the Colossians; and after these two to the Thessalonians; and that to the Hebrews; and additionally, two to Timothy, one to Titus, and finally that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.\textsuperscript{115}

An Earlier Date for the New Testament Codex

Tomas Bokedal believes the New Testament codex was written much sooner than the fourth century. In his book \textit{The Formation and Significance of the Christian Biblical Canon}, he opens with several foundational comments. First, he notes the importance of the Bible for today’s believer. “It is more than a collection of documents…the Bible is handed down to the contemporary reader and listener not as a series of text or artefacts [sic] from the past, but as a theologically defined literary unit.”\textsuperscript{116} Bokedal, in defense of orthodox Christianity, asks and answers the question on what exactly makes the biblical writings so important. His answer: “It is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{113}{Ibid., 60.}
\footnotetext{114}{In par. 24 Athanasius said that in seeking the faith, it is discovered through the Scriptures so that one might believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As with the Apostle John, Athanasius’s purpose is to glorify the Godhead.}
\footnotetext{115}{Ibid., 60-61. Note: Athanasius’s Old Testament list was twenty-two, having combined all the minor prophets into one book. Though there is disagreement on Paul’s authorship of Hebrews, Athanasius give Paul credit for it.}
\end{footnotes}
clear to me that the reading of these texts as canon…is a matter of great importance to every Christian community.” 117 He quotes Origen (185-254 AD) that “[a]ll the Scriptures are one book because all the teaching that has come to us about Christ is recapitulated in one single whole.” 118 The goal of his research is to highlight the question: What is the biblical canon, and what does it mean for the Bible to function as a canon for the Church? Even more to the point, Bokedal quotes John Barton and asks, “How and why did the Church come to accept as authoritative Scripture a New Testament container no more and no less than twenty-seven books, and to place this alongside either the Hebrew or the Greek Scriptures, renamed the ‘Old Testament’? 119 As noted previously with Athanasius’s canonical list, the books cited were already considered inspired. Why was that?

John Barton points out that Bokedal argued, “The New Testament canon was accepted as a finished whole much earlier than is granted by the prevailing consensus at the moment.” 120 Citing Justin’s knowledge that Christian assemblies liturgically read from the ‘writings of the apostles’ and from the prophets,” the early Church must have considered the Christian writings as on par with the Old Testament. 121

Bokedal relies on two types of evidence for an earlier canon. One is the nomina sacra (“Sacred Names”), which would suggest a greater unity of the canon than previously considered. 122 The major nomina sacra in early times were God, Jesus, and Spirit, 123 which were

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117 Ibid., 4.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 18.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
used in the developing creedal confessions of the time. These *nomina sacra* were written in a contracted form often with the first and last letters with horizontal strokes over them. Sacred names were a basic summary of the Rule of Faith (“The Rule of Faith was a summary of the apostolic message and expressed legitimate content of Scripture, not a separate body of doctrine.”). Other evidence for Bokedal’s assertions is the early church’s use of the codex. With a codex, the Church would have been able to have more than one book for use. For instance, there is a four-Gospel codex, with the other major sections of the New Testament available in codices also in existence very early in the Church. For Bokadal, the “New Testament writings already *functioned* as canonical Scripture from the early 2nd century onwards.

Bokedal’s hermeneutic rules for this view of Scripture is as follows:

One, Scripture is a whole. Two, Scripture is a whole only because it is one long narrative. Three, to be able to follow the single-story and grasp Scripture whole, the interpreter needs to know the story’s general plot and *dramatis personae* (the main characters of a narrative). Four, it is the church that knows this plot and *dramatis personae* of the scriptural narrative since the church is one continuous community with the story’s actions and narrators. And five, the church’s antecedent knowledge of Scripture’s plot and *dramatis personae* enabling reading of the Bible as a whole, is contained in the Rule of Faith – the canon that the church propounds and teaches her members regarding how to think and talk as Christians.

Bokedal’s assertions are worth considering for the 21st century Christian, if for no other reason than today’s believer can rest assured that what is in the Bible today is what God intended, regardless of the many claims of atheists, non-believers, and false religions.

David Nord agrees when he says that from the early days of the Church, long before the Bible was canonized, Christians collected, copied and circulated Paul’s letters and the

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124 Ferguson, *Church History*, 74.
126 Ibid., 621.
Gospels. The takeaway for Nord, whose work deals primarily with early American Puritanism and Calvinism, is that Scripture was always meant to be read by all. The doctrines of the Scripture should lead one to seek the truth from God’s Word directly, rather than depending on another’s interpretation.

Martin Hengel adds additional context to an earlier codex of New Testament writings than Athanasius’. Hengel points out that the question of “Why are there four gospels?” actually helps prove an earlier recognized collection of the New Testament (at least as far as the gospels are concerned). To Hengel, the preoccupation of many who question the validity of four gospels to tell the one gospel story of Jesus Christ began before 180 AD. In 180 AD, Irenaeus reportedly was the first to use a “canon” of recognized apostolic writings, and “[t]hat he had to defend the fact of four ‘apostolic’ Gospels with a variety of arguments indicates not only that the existence of the Four-Gospels-Collection was older, but also that it had been attacked.”

The Canon as Liturgy

Harry Gamble makes a strong case that the biblical canon, finalized by Athanasius, supported by Eusebius a half-century earlier, and debated for its authorial authenticity throughout the centuries, was, in fact, the very books used since the first century Christians. His reasons come down to several important points. First, as it is suspected that less than one out of ten in the first century were literate, the practice of public reading was prevalent. The importance

128 Ibid., 5. This view, of course, has been quite revolutionary over the course of centuries, but today’s Evangelical believer holds to this truth for the most part.
of this fact leads to the probable conclusion this was also true for first-century Christians. This alone meant the Gospels and Epistles were penned with that in mind.130

Second, why were twenty-seven books chosen for the New Testament? Gamble notes that even today there is still dispute on how the process developed. While the dominant theory is that the New Testament canon came to be because of the theological controversies of the 2nd century (i.e., putting an authoritative canon together to fight off cultish theologies such as Marcionism and Gnosticism), the exact opposite is true. Gamble believes that “the history of the canon as a function of the history of the public reading and interpretation of scripture”131 was the guidance for the canon.

Gamble believes it was the history of liturgy that was the determining factor for the New Testament canon as it used today. As public reading for worship was a common practice in the early church, and because Christian writings were read aloud for liturgical purposes, it is most probable that the reading of the New Testament gospels and epistles occurred often during the worship of the early Church. With this in mind, it can also be assumed the early Church was biblically literate to a much higher degree than was previously supposed. Not because Gamble and others are saying early Christians were literate in general, but because the constant reading of Old Testament writings and Christian gospels and epistles were a significant part of the liturgy.

The longstanding tradition of reading scripture during liturgical services provides a great anecdote found in a letter written to Jerome by Augustine. It concerned the reading of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate in a local church at the time (403 AD). The bishop of a Christian congregation in

131 Ibid., 36.
Oea (modern Tripoli, Libya) read out of the book of Jonah from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate rather than the usual Old Latin translation.

In the course of this reading, the bishop came upon a word […] of which you have given a very different rendering from that which had long been familiar to the senses and memory of all the worshippers and had been read for so many generations in the church. Then there arose such a tumult in the congregation, especially among the Greek-speakers, correcting what had been read and denouncing the translation as false, that the bishop was compelled to ask assistance from Jewish residents.\textsuperscript{132}

Augustine went on to tell Jerome that the bishop buckled under the pressure of the discontented believers as “the man was compelled to correct your version in that passage […] since he desired not to be left without a congregation – a calamity which he narrowly escaped.”\textsuperscript{133}

While the story is humorous, its message is profound for today’s Church. These congregants, most who were probably illiterate, had heard the book of Jonah read to them so often that they were able to discern the change of one word! Note how Augustine says the liturgical reading of Scripture had been occurring for “many generations” and was clearly engraved in their minds when he notes Jerome had given “a very different rendering from that which had long been familiar to the sense and memory of all the worshippers.”\textsuperscript{134} One can only imagine how biblically literate these illiterate worshippers were of the Gospels and epistles of the New Testament!

The Pre-Reformation, The Reformation and Biblical Literacy

The Pre-Reformation

Prior to the Reformation, the Church had leaders who loved God’s Word and shared that love with others. Much of the theology of many pre-Reformation leaders was Catholic in nature, and thus a point of contention with Evangelicals today. But some of their writings are still

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 37-38 [emphasis added].
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., [emphasis added].
worthy of consideration for today’s Protestant believer. One such individual was St. Bonaventure (1217-1274 AD), a Franciscan monk, who was known in his time as Doctor Devotus, the Devout Teacher, because of his sermons and writings.

St. Bonaventure’s writings are mystical in nature, as are many of the writings of the time. His best-known work, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (The Soul’s Journey unto God), is a study of the quest for an experience of the Triune God, with an emphasis on the steps the seeker must make to “enter into the Cloud and the Unknowing.”¹³⁵ But his work, *Lignum vitae* (The Tree of Life) is the focus in this project as an example of the experiential relationship with Christ that is often missing from today’s believer, and could be found by rediscovering the daily reading of God’s Word. The Tree of Life was birthed by Bonaventure’s desire to memorize the story of Jesus’ ministry found in the Gospels. As the “Tree of Life,” Jesus’ life as described in the Gospels has produced fruit by which Bonaventure feeds upon spiritually through meditation and prayers drawn from the Gospel narrative. There are twelve branches bearing twelve fruits, all directly connected with Jesus’ narrative, a mnemonic, as it were, that aids the believer in experiencing Jesus.

This writer believes *Lignum vitae* provides a valuable lesson for the Church today. The experiential reading of God’s Word, something Bonaventure has done with regards to the Gospels, can reignite the passion of the haphazard believer today who easily ignores the regimen of reading the Bible. For instance, Bonaventure’s fruit outlines the life of Jesus, where prayerful meditation can guide the believer to a lifelong adventure of imaginative reading of God’s Word. The Catholic influence is keen on the believer’s works (Bonaventure uses the term “striving” and

“endeavor” to describe the believer’s responsibility).

However, the evangelical believer today, in recognizing that God’s grace is the key to real victory, can undoubtedly recognize the value in seeing one’s self in the narrative to bring some clarity to the actual event. When Bonaventure’s branches of fruit are used to help the believer relate to the stories such as Jesus’ baptism, temptation, miracles, transfiguration, passion, crucifixion, and resurrection, one is offered a tremendous opportunity to experience Christ in a new and powerful way.

The story of how the printed Bible came to be in its’ present form is a fascinating study that has all the makings of a modern-day drama. The experiential gap that exists between the sacrifices made by the Reformers, and the lack of interest by many today, is breathtaking as one comes to understand how the Word of God came to the 21st-century believer. The lack of availability of Scripture for the lower classes and non-clergy before the Reformation makes today’s availability of the Bible in such a variety of languages difficult to comprehend.

John Wycliffe produced the first hand-written English language Bible in the 1380’s AD. He was well known for his opposition to the teachings of the organized Church, and with the help of his followers produced dozens of English translations of Scripture. Wycliffe was known as a zealot who despised neutrality and, along with John Hus, believed the Church was to be something other than the visible organization it had become under the popes. Wycliffe’s contribution to biblical literacy has a foundation in the doctrinal issues he contended for between God’s dominion and lordship over humankind. The Catholic Church and Popes at that time taught that lordship arose from God alone. But how was this right to rule transmitted from God

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136 Ibid., 119.
137 The benefit drawn from Bonaventure’s work is not to teach that soulish works by the believer opens the door to deeper experiences not otherwise occurring, but rather that reading the Bible imaginatively, placing oneself in the narrative, is a great way to experience God’s Word and His presence.
138 Shelley, 234-35.
to earthly rulers? The commonly held belief at the time was that God had entrusted the Pope with universal dominion “overall temporal things and persons. Any authority exercised by sinful rulers was unlawful."\(^{139}\) This played out in the life of Wycliffe as he argued that the government had the divine responsibility to correct the abuses of the church within its lands and could remove churchman from office who persisted in sin.\(^{140}\)

Wycliffe’s stance on the issue of dominion and lordship help lay the groundwork for the Reformation and his choice to translate the Latin Bible into English. Wycliffe’s focus led to the emphasis of the spiritual freedom of the righteous man. Thus that man is a “possessor of ‘a dominion founded on grace.’”\(^{141}\) In other words, “God gives no lordship to His servants without first giving Himself to them.”\(^{142}\) And though Wycliffe’s theology was to fight the overbearing rule of the Catholic Church and those he saw as sinful and unjust ecclesiastical leaders and popes, he helped clear the way for Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone, thus destroying the manmade barriers between God and humankind. This led to Wycliffe’s most significant accomplishment, the hand-written English translation of the Bible—opening God’s Word to the masses.

Finally, Wycliffe’s contributions reached their zenith in his declaration on the priesthood of every believer and the resulting philosophy that every person has the right to God’s Word, to read and understand as the Holy Spirit led. Wycliffe spoke of every man, priest, or layman, as holding an equal place in the eyes of God. Thus, even in his confrontations with the Roman Church, Wycliffe’s standard for judging the Catholic Church was the teachings of Scripture. As

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 235.

\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

\(^{142}\) Ibid., 236.
he said, “Neither the testimony of Augustine nor Jerome nor any other should be accepted except in so far as it was based upon Scripture.”

One of Wycliffe’s followers, John Hus, pursued Wycliffe’s passion for making the Bible available in English. He was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, and famously declared “in 100 years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed.” Hus’s martyrdom was a result of his preaching of “Christ’s law, i.e., God’s word. Opponents charged him with putting Scripture in place of the Church as the judge of truth, and so undervaluing tradition.”

**The Reformation**

The Reformation continued the avalanche of change for the Church that led to the promulgation of the availability of Scripture to the masses that heretofore had not existed. It is no small statement to say that the Reformation and access to God’s Word brought to believers by the works of men like Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, and others, made a tremendous impact on the church. To what extent did making Scripture available to everyone increase biblical literacy? Another way to ask this is this: Did making Scripture available to everyone increase biblical literacy and people’s understanding of the Christian message? The Reformation restored faith in Christ alone and the Word of God as the final authority. But did it restore the liturgical reading of God’s Word among believers? Luther’s emphasis on *sola scriptura, sola gratia,* and *sola fide* returned the Church to the foundations of the early Church.

The Reformation restored the authority of Scripture over the words and traditions of religious leaders and led to a desire for Scripture to be available to every believer. For many, Luther’s most significant contribution to the Reformation was restoring the foundation of Scripture to the Church. As Luther saw it, Scripture alone is the centerpiece for all preaching.

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143 Ibid., 237.
And the centrality of Scripture to Luther and Calvin was the gospel.¹⁴₅ This is an important distinction for the Reformation, and what has led evangelicals in their interpretation of Scripture. How does one define the Church? For Luther and Calvin, the Reformation defined a local congregation as a true church not by what they fully understood about Scripture, but whether they “preserved and preached the pure gospel message.” Only then were they considered the true church.¹⁴₆ This will carry significant weight in the next chapter as the survey for this project is discussed and how today’s self-identified Christians respond to questions concerning the Gospel.

The Age of Enlightenment and Biblical Literacy

The Age of Enlightenment was a time of intellectual upheaval and a rise of an army of “doubting Thomas’” Sadly, traditional theology and Christianity became targets for this time of intellectualism, the results of which still have an influence today. William Abraham, speaking to those impacted by the Enlightenment, said that the modern person “is one informed by the canons of rationality developed in the European Enlightenment.”¹⁴⁷ Hall notes that this Enlightenment rationality has led to the rejection of the biblical claim of special revelation, which in turn leads to a rejection of the miraculous, as the possibility of divine intervention in human history is no longer valid.¹⁴⁸

Robert Wilken claimed “that the Enlightenment’s exaggerated suspicion of tradition has led to the astonishing modern incapacity to ‘accept with gratitude what has come before it and what has been done on its behalf.’”¹⁴⁹ Epistemology and theology took on a different significance during the time of enlightenment. No longer could one look to Scripture as objective

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
¹⁴⁷ Hall, Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers, 19.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 28.
truth. Instead, the rationality, or reasoning, of the day held sway. The “intellectual revolution” which began with the Renaissance and found its most significant influence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, created its own gods of observation and experimentation. That is, science was seen as the primary, if not the only, means of obtaining knowledge.  

The corpses of spiritual revelation were thrown aside and replaced with the Age of Reason, whose gods could be seen, touched, and experimented. The Enlightenment influenced how today’s theologian and modern Christian tend to read the Bible; this approach has become a path of doubt towards anything unexplainable. Today’s theologian, and in many respects today’s Christians, “Question increasingly the coherence significance and moral stance of Christian doctrine and authority.”

The Enlightenment’s message of reason affected religion, and even how the Church saw Christ. He was no longer Lord and Christ of the Universe, but the ethical, exemplary, and moral example for the world to follow. The Bible was no longer venerated as God’s Word, but “biblical texts…[that] were wholly unreliable.” The Bible became a historical document, and biblical faith eventually became just one religion, among others.

There were those in that period who recognized the Bible’s value to society. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 AD), the famous German philosopher who authored the major philosophical work *Critique of Pure Reason*, noted the “existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.”

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151 Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 22.
Postmodernism was a reaction to the Enlightenment in that reason gave way to the individualism of cultural and sociological perspectives of “what can we get out of nature and history for our own uses.”\textsuperscript{154} Alasdair MacIntyre noted that the subjective perspectivism of Postmodernism overcame Enlightenment philosophy because, as Stanly Fish asked: “Can we any longer speak of \textit{absolute values or authorities outside of ourselves}?\textsuperscript{155} The temptation of self-interest at the expense of objective truth has relegated the Bible for many to the dusty top of the bookshelf, if one is owned at all. Biblical literacy fell into the open, hands of progressives and liberals who were eager to disdain God, the supernatural, and anything that threatens humankind’s right to rule.

In describing the upheaval experienced in America during the 1960’s and 1970s, Dr. Kroll noted that:

The activism of the 1960s gave way to pessimism, cynicism, and disillusionment in the 1970s. Americans questioned everything, including the Bible. God was seen as distant and his Word was becoming more distant as well…In \textit{Engel v. Vitale} (1962), the…Supreme Court ruled that prayer in public schools breached the constitutional wall of separation between church and state. And in \textit{Abington v. Schempp} (1963), the high court found that Bible reading over the school intercom was unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{156}

It is little wonder that Dr. Kroll said: “The real problem in the face of this epidemic of Bible illiteracy is that most people, including most Christians, are not ready to accept the responsibility for their ignorance of the only Book God ever wrote.”\textsuperscript{157}

It is, indeed, a dangerous sign in America when those who call themselves Christians today are so indifferent towards God’s Word. The Church has lost much of its influence in the post-Christian American culture today for many reasons, but the decline in the commitment to

\textsuperscript{154} Hall, \textit{Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers}, 29.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{156} Kroll, \textit{Taking Back the Good Book}, 50.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 205.
God’s Word, can be named among them. To follow is a brief history of how our founding fathers and other great early Americans felt about the Bible and its importance to the success of the United States of America.

America and Biblical Literacy

Early American History

Mary Juzwik wrote on the contextualization of American Evangelicalism and noted that in the early years of America, throughout the Colonial period, “The capacity to read the Bible was seen as a critical motivation for literacy teaching and learning in schools.”158 Juzwik pointed out that the influence of the Bible on early American Puritanism affected their entire view of culture and way of life, including how they viewed those they considered heathen and civil Christian culture.159

Juzwik wrote that historically, a significant component of Luther’s sola scriptura doctrine was that “the Bible reveals all matters of faith and practice necessary for salvation…”160 Religious authority was no longer centralized with priests and church tradition. Instead: “sola scriptura insists on privileging the written word of scripture as the only source of God’s Truth.”161 This concept continued throughout American history, as well, with fundamentalists. But “Biblicism”, as Juzwik refers to evangelical theology, took two different paths in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries as the status of the Bible was questioned by modernists, who insisted the Bible was merely an ancient religious text but not authoritative in any direct sense as fundamentalists interpret.162

159 Ibid.
160 Ibid., 339.
161 Ibid., 337.
162 Ibid.
Among the Founding Fathers, there was great respect for the Bible. The Bible not only had a place of importance in the culture and lives of the founders, but many were also students of the Bible.¹⁶³ Ellis Sandoz says of that period that “Bible reading was ubiquitous in America throughout the period,” and, “The culture was religious, and the American people were biblically literate…politicians…often invoked the text sacred to the American people. The Bible…was [t]he most important source of meaning for eighteenth-century Americans.”¹⁶⁴

The first generation of Americans read and studied the Bible often and referred to it in reverence and acknowledged its importance in encouraging morals for the “self-governing people.” Patrick Henry (1736-1799) said the Bible was a “book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed.”¹⁶⁵ John Dickinson (1732-1808), a member of the First and Second Continental Congresses and delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, said “the book [Bible] has done more good than all the books in the world; would do much more, if duly regarded; and might lead the objectors against it to happiness, if they would value it as they should.”¹⁶⁶

**Early Branches of the American Government**

**Early Presidents**

Among America’s first Presidents, the Bible was highly revered. George Washington noted in a circular letter to the United States that “the pure and benign light of Revelation…[has] had a meliorating influence on mankind and increased the blessings of Society.” Driesbach notes that Washington’s reference to Revelation was “meant [to be] the Bible – as having had a

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¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
‘meliorating influence on mankind’ greater than an understanding of ‘the rights of mankind,’ the ‘researches of the human mind,’ knowledge and wisdom in the science of politics, and ‘extension of Commerce,’ or ‘liberality of sentiment.’ In essence, Washington ‘‘claimed that the revelation of the Bible was the most important boon to society in history.’’\footnote{Ibid.} In the same letter, Washington referenced Micah 6:8 when he said:

\begin{quote}
I now make it my earnest prayer, that God…would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.\footnote{Daniel L. Dreisbach, "What Does God Require of Us?: Micah 6:8 in the Literature of the American Founding." In \textit{Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199987931.003.0005). \footnote{Federer, \textit{America’s God and Country}, 4-5. \footnote{Ibid. 5.}}}
\end{quote}

John Adams (1735-1826), the 2\textsuperscript{nd} President of the United States, served as the Vice-President to George Washington for eight years. He was the first President to live in the White House, and he presided over the establishment of the Library of Congress and the Department of the Navy. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and held the distinction for having urged Thomas Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. He was a strong influence on the American states in ratifying the Constitution by writing a three-volume work entitled, \textit{A Defense of the Constitution of the Government of the United States}.\footnote{Ibid. 5.} In his diary dated February 22, 1756, John Adams wrote:

\begin{quote}
Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love and reverence toward Almighty God…What Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} 5.}
\end{quote}
He also said later in his life: “I have examined all [religions], as well as my narrow Sphere, my straightened means and my busy Life would allow me; and the result is, that the Bible is the best book in the World. It contains more of my little Phylosophy [sic] than all the Libraries I have seen.”\textsuperscript{171} His son, John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), the sixth President of the United States, said: “The first and almost the only Book deserving of universal attention is the Bible.”\textsuperscript{172}

In fact, John Quincy Adam’s admiration for, and realization of the relevance of the Bible in the life of America, is captured in his writings to his son. The depth of personal humility and love for God’s Word with Adams is unquestionably the most revealing and enlightening in the quest to understanding America’s early history with the Bible. In one of Adams’ letters to his son, written in September 1822, Adams acknowledged being told that his son reads a chapter of the Bible every evening and wrote:

This information gave me real pleasure; for so great is my veneration for the Bible, and so strong my belief, that when duly read and meditated on, it is of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men good, wise, and happy – that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more steadily they pursue the practice of reading, it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove to be useful citizens to their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents.\textsuperscript{173}

Throughout Adams’ letters, he admonished respect for the Bible, oftentimes recalling personal stories of what he considered God’s wisdom as prevailing upon him in his many duties as a public servant. In that first letter mentioned above, Adams said that his custom was to read four or five chapters every morning immediately after rising from his bed. This action would usually take him about one hour and, as he said, it “seems to me the most suitable manner of

\textsuperscript{171} Dreisbach, “The Bible in the Lives of the Founding Fathers”.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} John Quincy Adams, \textit{Letters Of John Quincy Adams, To His Son, On The Bible And Its Teachings}. (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), Kindle, under “The Bible and Its Teachings: Letter I.”
John Quincey Adams was, without a doubt, one of the greatest proponents of the influential power the Bible holds over an individual and nation when put in its proper place.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826 AD), the writer of the Declaration of Independence and 3rd President (1801-09 AD), whose comments on the separation between church and state have been misconstrued and used to squelch freedom of religion in the last century, once wrote in his catalog of books for his library, “I am for freedom of Religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another.” He often spoke of attending church, and did so at Christ Church when he was in Philadelphia, and Bruton Parish Church with George and Martha Washington when in Williamsburg. His reliance on Scripture as a ruling force for humanity is found in his Notes on Religion:

If we are Protestants…and rely on the Scripture alone, for that is the...common principle of all the Protestants…A church is “a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together…to the public worshiping of God in such a manner as they judge acceptable to Him and effectual salvation of their souls.”…No man has the right to abandon the care of his salvation to another.

Throughout his public career, Jefferson’s pen flowed (e.g., he drafted “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom) and his voice spoke (as in his First Inaugural Address given on March 4, 1801, where he stated, “May that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe, lead our councils to what is best.”), on the foundational truths found in Scripture which prepared

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174 Ibid.
175 Federer’s For God and Country offers a detailed history of how the 14th Amendment was used by activist judges to redefine the role of the Bill of Rights, particularly the first eight, from limiting Federal Government to limiting State Governments. In 1937, Roosevelt nominated Senator Hugo Black, having never served as a judge, to the Supreme Court. Black went on to purposefully edit Jefferson’s comment on the “establishment of religion” to say, “Neither a State,” thus opening the door to devolving the First Amendment to what it is known as today. p. 93.
176 Federer, America’s God and Country, 323.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 324 [emphasis added].
179 Ibid., 325.
the way for establishing the Judeo-Christian laws of the United States of America, including the
prominence of God’s Word in the American way of life.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845), seventh President (1829-1837), once spoke of the Almighty Being whom he hoped would overrule all Jackson’s intentions and inspire the hearts of fellow-citizens.\textsuperscript{180} In a letter to his son, Andrew Jr., Jackson encouraged his son to “rely with confidence on the promises of our dear Redeemer, and give Him our hearts…if we sincerely do this, we are sure of salvation through his atonement.”\textsuperscript{181}

Zachary Taylor (1784-1850), was the 12\textsuperscript{th} President of the United States, who died while in office, serving from March 1849 until July 1850). In February 1849, Taylor received a Bible and a copy of the Constitution from a delegation of ladies from Frankfurt, KY. In his letter acknowledging the gifts, Taylor said, “It was for the love of the truths of this great Book that our fathers abandoned their native shores for the wilderness. Animated by its lofty principles they toiled and suffered till the desert blossomed as a rose. The same truths sustained them in their resolutions to become a free nation; and guided by the wisdom of this Book; they founded a government...”\textsuperscript{182}

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), served and died as the 16\textsuperscript{th} President (1861-1865), during one of the greatest struggles of the United States—the Civil War. Lincoln’s trust in the God of the Bible can be found throughout his public career. In acknowledging the Bible as a gift on September 5, 1864, Lincoln wrote that: “In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Saviour gave to the world was

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 308.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 309.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Federer, America’s God and Country, 380.
\end{footnotes}
communicated through this Book. But for this Book, we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.”

The Supreme Court

Other founders were also explicit in their belief of the Bible as God’s Word. Among those were John Jay (1745-1829), President of the Continental Congress and first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, who said, “The Bible is the best of all Books, for it is the word [sic] of God…” Doctor John Witherspoon (1723-1794), a signer of the Declaration of Independence, believed the Bible is the Word of God and the only rule for the Christian faith. He noted, “[W]hat belongs to the character of a Christian must be taken from the holy Scriptures, the word of the living God,” and “Give yourselves much to reading, and hearing the word of God.”

John Jay was instrumental, along with James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, in the ratification of the Constitution. In 1777, he helped write the Constitution of New York and served as Governor of the State of New York from 1795-1801. Along with his many public roles, Jay was also elected President of the Westchester Bible Society in 1818 and President of the ABS in 1821. Concerning the Bible, Jay once said in an address to the ABS that:

By conveying the Bible to people thus circumstanced, we certainly do them a most interesting kindness…The Bible will also inform them that our gracious Creator has provided for us a Redeemer, in whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; that this Redeemer has made atonement ‘for the sins of the whole world,’ and thereby, reconciling the Divine justice with the Divine mercy has opened a way for our redemption and salvation.”

Justice John Marshall (1755-1835) was Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court for thirty-four years (1801-1835). He was the longest-serving chief justice, and fourth longest-

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184 Dreisbach, “The Bible in the Lives of the Founding Fathers”.
186 Ibid.
serving justice in American history. Appointed by President John Adams, Marshall was a strong advocate for the ratification of the Constitution. He also served publicly as a U.S. Congressman, Secretary of State, and U.S. Minister to France. The *Winchester Republican* newspaper published an event that once happened where Chief Justice Marshall was waylaid by a broken carriage, and while resting in a tavern, became privy to a discussion among some young men on “the merits of the Christian religion.”

The debate…lasted from six o’clock until eleven. No one knew Marshall, who sat quietly listening. Finally, one of the youthful combatants turned to him and said: Well, my old gentlemen, what think you of these things? Marshall responded with a ‘most eloquent and unanswerable appeal. He talked for an hour, answering ‘every argument urged against’ the teachings of Jesus. ‘In the whole lecture, there was so much simplicity and energy, pathos, and sublimity, that not another word was uttered.”

Marshall’s passion for his faith extended to his family and personal actions as well. His daughter recalls how he once insisted on taking communion publicly, just a short time before his passing, because “he thought it his duty to make a public confession of the Saviour…”

Samuel Chase (1741-1811) was another early Supreme Court justice who served from 1796-1811. A critical contribution to the freedom to practice religion in America was made, in his opinion, written in *Runkel v. Winemiller*, 1799. Chase said, “Religion is of general and public concern, and on its support depend, in great measure, the peace and good order of government, the safety and happiness of the people.” He was appointed by George Washington and also wrote in a case in Maryland in 1799 that “by our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed upon the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty.”

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187 Ibid., 417.
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid., 101.
Sir William Blackstone (1723-1790), while not a Supreme Court jurist, influenced American Law in helping to form its basis of law. Blackstone was an English jurist who authored *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, which by 1775 had sold more copies in America than in England.\(^{191}\) His influence on American jurisprudence was rivaled only by his reliance on the Bible and God’s eternal laws. Blackstone’s presuppositions of law can be seen in these several quotes:

-Man, considered as a creature, must necessarily be subject to the laws of his Creator, for he is entirely a dependent being…it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker’s will…this will of his Maker is called the law of nature…the doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the holy scriptures…to deny the possibility, nay, actual existence, of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once to contradict the revealed Word of God in various passages both of the Old and New Testament.\(^ {192}\)

One humorous story concerning Blackstone’s spiritual influence on American law comes from the famous Second Great Awakening revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875). Finney noted in his autobiography that he began a study of Blackstone’s *Commentaries* from his desire in his earlier years to become an attorney. In Finney’s words, as Blackstone covered different legal concepts, he often presented the Biblical ideas that formed the foundation for these laws. Finney noted that in studying Blackstone’s legal commentary, there was so much reading of the Bible that Finney became a Christian and received his call to the ministry.\(^ {193}\)

David Barton notes that, along with Blackstone, a survey of other authors showed a similar reliance on Biblical passages to guide decisions for the young country. Thirty-four percent of the quotes in the writings of the Founding Era came directly from the Bible, while others quotes, such as those by Blackstone, used the Bible to arrive at conclusions. “The Bible,

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\(^{192}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{193}\) David Barton, *America’s Godly Heritage*, (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilders Press, 2011), Kindle, loc. 328
therefore, was far and away the most influential source of ideas in the Founding Era.”\textsuperscript{194} Several early Supreme Court cases involved the necessity for the court to take a stance on the use of the Bible. In one unanimous decision in 1892, the Supreme Court declared America to be a Christian nation. In a 2\textsuperscript{nd} decision a school in Philadelphia had a policy which disallowed Christian ministers from being on campus. The Supreme Court saw this as an attempt to keep the Bible out of the school, so they declared by another unanimous decision that,

Why may not the Bible, and especially the New Testament…be read and taught as a divine revelation in the [school]…its general precepts expounded…and its glorious principles of morality inculcated?…Where can the purest principles of morality be learned so clearly or so perfectly as from the New Testament?”\textsuperscript{195}

The Early Congress, Other Early Leaders

In the early days of America, while still under British rule before the Revolutionary War, it was illegal to print an English-language Bible in America. The policy ended with the victory over Britain and the establishing of America as a separate entity. A Philadelphia printer, Robert Aitken, requested from Congress permission to print an English-language Bible, noting that it would be “a neat edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools.”\textsuperscript{196} Congress agreed and after the Bible was completed, the committee, created by Congress to see the project through, announced in the summer of 1782;“Whereupon, Resolved, That the United States in Congress assembled…recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States.”\textsuperscript{197} Barton quotes an early historian regarding this matter who said there was little need for anyone to question the Founder’s religious fortitude in light of the fact that Congress performed the duties of a Bible Society long before one had been established!\textsuperscript{198}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., loc. 99. \\
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid. \\
\end{flushright}
Driesbach does point out there were other early founders and influencers who did not hold such high regard for the spiritual foundations of the Bible, but still noted its importance and ethical, moral teachings. Many were influenced by the Enlightenment rationalism of the day, which rejected the orthodox (supernatural) Christian view of the Bible. Those included such well-known men as Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), and others. While these leaders did not believe in the supernatural acts of the Scriptures, they nevertheless understood the Bible’s significance and importance for the founding of the young country.

Benjamin Franklin is considered one of the great intellectuals of early America. He is quoted to say at the end of the Constitutional Convention that: “Our General Convention…when it formed the new Federal Constitution, [was]…influenced, guided, and governed by that omnipotent and beneficent Ruler in whom all…live, and move, and have their being.”

Franklin’s belief in God and the providential nature of the new America can be seen at one point during the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787. Where Mark Beliles notes even the presiding George Washington despaired of success due to lack of progress and emotions being “on edge,” Benjamin Franklin, then 81 years old, addressed the delegates on the necessity of daily prayer and God’s guidance. and said that:

All of us who were engaged in the struggle, (of the Revolutionary War), must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor…Have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance?...the more I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?...I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel…I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning.

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200 Ibid., 172.
Roger Sherman (1721-1793) holds the distinction as the only Founding Father to have signed all four of the essential founding documents: The Articles of Association, 1774; the Declaration of Independence, 1776; The Articles of Confederation, 1777; and the Constitution of the United States, 1787.\(^\text{201}\) Sherman frequently referred to Scripture in his writings, using Scripture as a foundation for what he considered sound judgment and action. Sherman succeeded in directing President Washington to declare a national Thanksgiving Day holiday. He justified his request by referring to the Biblical records of thanksgiving and rejoicings that occurred when Solomon dedicated the temple. On another occasion, Sherman objected to the military decision to allow army deserters being court-martialed to receive five-hundred lashes, quoting from Deuteronomy 25:3 – “Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed; lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee.”\(^\text{202}\)

George Read (1733-1798), signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. He was a delegate from Delaware to the Constitutional Convention, a U.S. Senator, and a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Delaware.\(^\text{203}\) Read, “the Father of Delaware,” wrote Delaware’s first laws and included the following in the state’s Constitution’s requirement to hold public office:

> Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house or appointed to any office or place of trust...shall...make and subscribe the following declaration, to wit, 'I, _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore, and I acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.'\(^\text{204}\)

Patrick Henry (1736-1799) was Governor of Virginia five different times. He turned down numerous appointments from President Washington, but he was a Commander in Chief of

\(^\text{202}\) Ibid., 559.
\(^\text{203}\) Ibid., 527.
\(^\text{204}\) Ibid., 527-28.
the Virginia Militia and a member of the Continental Congress. Henry’s famous quote, “Give me Liberty or give me Death,” given during the Second Virginia Convention in 1775, is indicative of his passion for freedom. Two examples provide a glimpse into Henry’s worldview. One involved three Baptist ministers in Spotsylvania County, Virginia in 1768. The three ministers were arrested for preaching contrary to the established Anglican Church and spent weeks in prison. Patrick Henry rode fifty miles to defend them at their trial. His defense boiled down to a few questions: “May it please your lordships, what did I hear read? Did I hear an expression that these men…are about to [be] try[ed] for…preaching the Gospel of the Son of God?”

Henry’s stance against slavery was also a Christian one, as he saw it. In 1773 Henry wrote, “Is it not amazing, that at a time when the rights of humanity are defined…with precision…we find men…adopting a principle as repugnant to humanity, as it is inconsistent with the Bible? He went on to say that slavery creates a debt owed to the purity of Christianity, which shows that slavery is adverse to the Biblical principles of freedom.

**Prayers of Our Fathers**

William Federer has collected the declarations for prayers and fasting by all the American Presidents up to our 43rd President, George W. Bush. In his introduction, Federer takes a note from Edward Winslow’s record of the Pilgrim experiences from 1841 that every good man examined his personal relationship with God, and humble themselves before the Lord by prayer and fasting.

Four days before the Battle of Lexington (April 15, 1775), John Hancock, the famous signer of the Declaration of Independence, led the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in

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205 Ibid., 287.
206 Ibid., 288.
declaring, “In circumstances dark as these, it becomes us, as men and Christians, to reflect that, whilst every prudent measure should be taken to ward off the impending judgments…the 11th of May next be set apart as a Day of Public Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer…to confess the sins…to implore the Forgiveness of all our Transgressions.”

As Governor of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson signed a Proclamation of Prayer, which stated, “Congress…hath through proper…to recommend to the several States…a day of publick and solemn Thanksgiving to Almighty God, for his mercies, and of Prayer, for the continuance of his favour…and spread the light of Christian knowledge through the remotest corners of the earth…”

It is thought-provoking to see that Jefferson’s words were misconstrued even during his own time. He wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1803 that his views “are the result of a life of inquiry and reflection, and very different from the anti-Christian system imputed to me by those who know nothing of my opinions. To the corruptions of Christianity, I am, indeed, opposed; but not the genuine precepts of Jesus himself.”

Recent American History

Matthew Levering notes the relevance of the believer who understands the doctrine and practices of Scripture in order to enter into the biblical world. This, in turn, leads the believer to formulate a worldview founded on Scripture, helping one to navigate the fast-rushing currents of an everchanging societal belief system. While Levering’s Roman Catholic faith reveals his tendency towards tradition over Scripture, he makes one crucial observation relevant to this project. Levering notes that modern theologians focus more on the Biblical text, and what the

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208 Ibid., 7.
209 Ibid., 10.
210 Ibid., 35.
original authors intended to their respective audiences, while traditional theologians (i.e., Roman Catholic), read the texts with a focus on the divine Teacher. There is a place for reason and theology, undoubtedly, in teaching today’s believer to understand God’s Word. However, as Levering points out, believers must also read Scripture with a focus on the author Himself. Barna’s surveys in The Bible in America noted the rise of Bible skeptics, especially among Gen-Xers and Millennials, saying “there is rising skepticism about the Bible as a sufficient guide for living a meaningful life.” This begs the question, “Where does the skepticism come from?” From the survey for this project, which will be noted in the next chapter, the lack of experiential knowledge of God and Christ leads more and more away from the traditional Christian faith.

Walter Moberly noted the challenges of modern-day theological discussion which may, or may not, portray biblical truth as it was initially conceived. Scripture provides its own context, but who is to say that one’s understanding and articulation of said truth today is accurate? This is, of course, a meaningful discussion in today’s world as many, including those raised in a Christian home or environment, discard the traditional views of religion and the Bible, choosing instead a false religion of an “if it feels good, do it” world. But there is one question that needs an answer: Has the Evangelical Church emphasized the dialectical line-upon-line teaching of Scripture at the expense of experiencing the Word of God by each believer? Is it possible that if the Church was to return to the regular liturgical reading of Scripture that believers would begin to experience God more, and as a result, restore the fervency and passion that the early Church experienced?

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212 Barna, *The Bible in America*, 57.
Distinguishing the different evangelical groups in America today, Juzwik uses Vincent Crapanzao’s ten key aspects of literalism to define Biblical Literalism as the historically-evangelical community. Among the aspects listed are these: that evangelicals hold to a belief that the biblical text can be understood; that God, rather than humans, is the actual author of the Biblical text; and treating specific biblical texts as fundamental to interpreting the entire text and valuing the written text of the Bible over spoken words and lived experiences. Another salient observation by Juzwik is that for the 20th - 21st century, “Evangelicals typically do not trust themselves to interpret the Bible. They turn to others (e.g., pastors, books, Bible study groups, commentaries) for interpretive guidance.”

Education

John Calvin’s Influence

There is no question that the contributions John Calvin made towards biblical literacy, and education in general, were significant. Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion became the standard-bearer of Reformed theology and provided Calvin with the foundation to create an educational system to teach literacy and the Bible. His desire, along with others, to free themselves and the Church from papal authority and the overbearing rule of the Roman Church led Calvin and the Reformers to interpret religious doctrine and practices on their own. The Reformers proclaimed that everyone had the right to read the Bible on their own, as the source of

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214 Juzwik, 337.
215 Ibid., 340.
God’s truth. As such, they regarded “Bible reading as essential to salvation, [and] the Protestant reformers promoted the primary school to educate future members of their churches as literate and prayerful people.”\textsuperscript{218}

Guttenberg’s printing press also contributed to the spread of Bible literacy, for several reasons. Prior to the printing press, Bible copies were written by hand, a laborious and lengthy task. This contributed to a lack of accessibility for the everyday believer, and also led to the ruling church institutions of the day misleading the masses due to that lack of availability. Guttenberg’s printing press allowed bibles to be printed in larger quantities, and other writings, such as books and tracts by Reformation leaders, helped propagate the Reformation and literacy in general.\textsuperscript{219} The Protestant Reformation grew as printing increased and literacy of the Bible increased. The Reformation itself can be contributed, in a large part, to the access of the Bible for the laity.

Calvin’s influence extended as literacy increased in Europe. The printing press made more books available, so curriculums and Bible literacy increased. The Reformed leaders, including Luther and Calvin, developed the catechism to help with learning doctrine in the classroom. Eventually, this type of question-answer format found its way into other subjects. However, Calvin’s contribution went much further than merely repeating statements in a rote manner. His ideas (and ideals) influenced America’s educational system. His Evangelical Protestantism was “a pedagogical religion that emphasized the importance of proclaiming the scripture through preaching, writing, and reading…this religion strongly emphasized the need for the faithful to be literate.”\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 119 [emphasis added].
\end{flushleft}
Public Education

There are arguments today, positive and negative, on the value of teaching religion, or the role the Bible should have in education. The American university systems have become increasingly antagonistic towards the Christian faith to the point that freedom of speech on college campuses is no longer tolerated. While many of the causes of this present-day animosity towards Christians and the Bible are problematic, it is beyond the purview of this project. However, one example is Ilene Allgood, who presents an excellent example of this animosity towards Christians by pointing out that growing up Jewish she felt “ostracized and marginalized in school…[which] prevented me from having an inclusive educational experience.”

Allgood’s early experiences shaped how she teaches in the university today. She emphasizes multiculturalism and religious plurality at the expense of truth. Her references to those who are “ignorant” or “dogmatic” are clearly aimed at conservative Christians who view the Bible as the final authority and truth. Quoting a Hindu proverb, Allgood points out there are “hundreds of paths up the mountain,” and noted despairingly the results of a 2008 Pew study which pointed out that religiously (i.e., Christian) affiliated people disagreed with the statement: “Many religions can lead to eternal life.” Religious tolerance in America is at the heart of the Constitution. However, as Christians, it is also essential to lay a biblical foundation which prepares believers to face an ungodly, and unwelcoming, world.

Mary Juzwik notes that in the early periods of American history, Baptists, under Roger Williams, founded the State of New Jersey as a protest of the intolerance Puritans displayed.

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222 Ibid., 283.
223 The website Gateways to Better Education offers a great number of helps and support for the teacher/school that wishes to negotiate the troubled waters of teaching the Bible and Christianity in the public classroom.
regarding their literalist’s interpretation of Scripture. In Juzwik’s understanding, the capacity to read the Bible was seen as a critical motivation for literacy teaching and learning in schools.

John Bracke and Karen Tye address the importance of understanding how learning occurs when the Bible is taught. They identify five types of memory learning that include Semantic memory, Episodic memory, Procedural memory, Automatic memory, and Emotional memory. Of the five types, Bracke and Tye suggest that memorizing via emotional associations that are related to information and experience is the most powerful, providing emotional “hooks” as key to learning. They note,

Emotional memory takes precedence over any other kind of memory. The brain always gives priority to emotions. When information enters the brain and reaches the thalamus, the amygdala will grab that information if it is emotional and go straight to work on it. If the information calls for strong emotion, especially fear, the amygdala takes over to prepare the body. Daniel Goleman…calls this response a “neural hijacking.” At this point, no other memory lanes have a chance…It is the strength of the emotional charge that is central to the brain’s processing and determining what is stored in long-term memory. As teachers, we need to pay attention to this. A key question to ask is, What is emotionally significant about this information or experience for my students? Another way to ask the question is, What stakes do the students have in this that they will want to remember it? We need to provide emotional hooks for the material we teach.

Bracke and Tye’s conclusions not only apply to students in the classroom but for all Christians, adults and children alike. If the emotional experience is most effective in learning the Bible and increasing its influence on today’s believer, how does that play out in the day-to-day lives of Christians?

Michael Anthony says that the gap in understanding how learning works is one of social experience. Because learning is more than cause-and-effect, but a natural phenomenon that cannot be turned on or off by choice, learning involves complex processes. Anthony offers a list

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224 Juzwik, 338.
225 Ibid.
226 John Bracke and Karen Tye, Teaching the Bible in the Church, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 28.
that suggests some ways the human mind is appropriately engaged.\textsuperscript{227} They include \textit{Perceiving, Remembering, Applying, and Valuing}.\textsuperscript{228} Anthony says that teaching requires a person to not only know but also feel, and that any type of teaching, regardless of its subject, the teacher, the student or the environment, will involve human relationships. That relationship is not just intellectual but also emotional. As Anthony notes, “Teaching is more dependent on human relationships within the learning context than upon the intellectual or informational components of the knowledge being taught.”\textsuperscript{229} Socially speaking, learning is continuous. The constant interaction with life and others leads to experience, which leads to learning. Therefore, the role of a learner is “persistent and inescapable.”\textsuperscript{230}

\textbf{The Digital World}

Few would disagree that the digital world has dramatically changed how Christians interact with the Bible. For many, the ease of access to the Bible on a smartphone, desktop computer, or Ipad opens a world of knowledge and experience they did not have previously. Others might argue that the printed Bible is the best, and God’s Word should not be relegated to something they may see as irreligious.

In Jeffrey Siker’s introduction to his book \textit{Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World}, appropriately titled “A Transition of Biblical Proportions,” he says, “The computer age in which we live has…had a dramatic impact on the technology of the Bible…the change in technology currently taking place with the emergence of a digital world is having dramatic repercussions

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 154.
that we are just beginning to fathom. Siker recalls a scene in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, in a world where books are outlawed, the only recourse rebels have is to memorize great works of literature. In this particular scene, the protagonist, Montag, is encouraged to “become” the book of Ecclesiastes. Memorization is the lifeline for these rebels, and each person is referred to by the book they have memorized.

The evaluation of digital Bibles over printed ones is outside the scope of this project. However, Siker does make a case for digital by noting a survey from Pew Research in 2015, where it is noted that the percentage of those who have read at least one printed book in a given year declined from 71% to 63% in a 4-year period (2011-2015). Indeed younger generations are becoming more detached from print and more attached to digital. Barna’s survey found that the trend is going downward in the frequency of reading the Bible, as Elders mature or pass away, and Millennials and Gen-Xer’s age.

A Barna Group study on the state of the Bible in 2018 revealed the appeal for the print version of the Bible still remains high at almost 9 in 10 (89%). The trend, however, is moving towards using technology. As Barna reports, using technology for reading the Bible has steadily climbed since their research began in 2011. More than half of users who search for Bible content do so on the internet (57%) or a smartphone (55%). Forty-two percent use a Bible app on their cell phones.

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232 Ibid., 17.
233 Ibid., 98.
234 Barna Group, *The Bible in America*, 52.
236 Ibid.
The next chapter, which evaluates the survey of 334 Christians and non-Christians will demonstrate that there is a significant gap between what should be the spiritual reality for the 21st century Christian what is the current reality. While the printed Bible is still in many homes, or available digitally, many have succumbed to the individualism and selfishness of the Post-modern age. This presents many challenges for the Church as it seeks to develop and implement life-changing discipleship. But as will be seen in the conclusion, there is always room for hope.
Chapter 4: Results

Survey Demographics

Twelve questions, referred to as benchmarks, were used to identify areas of concern pertaining to the purpose of this project, along with ten secondary questions allowing for a more precise understanding of the respondent's view of the value of the Bible in the believer’s life. These benchmarks provided a window into the beliefs and practices of the American Christian community for those polled, and it has supported concerns that have risen over the past several decades over the status of Christians in America. With the original thesis of this project assuming literacy of the Bible for American Christians is becoming negligible, the questions revealed some level of unbelief in God’s Word by self-identified Christians in America at worst, and a nonchalant, post-modern attitude towards God’s Word at best. The results should lead pastors and full-time Christian workers to seriously evaluate whether the Bible, though still held in high regard among believers, is having an impact.

Respondents who self-identified as Christian were categorized into two groups used to determine their spiritual interests and level of biblical literacy. The first are those who self-identified as Christian and met an evangelical definition in their responses, hereafter referred to as Biblically engaged. “Evangelicalism” includes:

Any Christian traditional enough to affirm the basic beliefs of the old nineteenth-century evangelical consensus: the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture, salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, the importance of evangelism and missions, and the importance of a spiritually transformed life.\textsuperscript{237}

For the biblically engaged Christians, the 12 benchmark questions and supplemental questions are broken down into 3 distinct categories: What one believes about the Bible, spiritual disciplines, and general Bible knowledge.238

The 2nd group of respondents self-identified as Christian but did not meet many of the criteria noted above and were not regularly engaged with the Bible or an evangelical, spiritual lifestyle. This 2nd group is referred to as Biblically non-engaged. Here are the major differences of the non-engaged group: their views on the origin of the Bible itself; how often they read their Bible outside of religious services; if they believed a better understanding of the Bible would give them a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment; if they believed the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to mankind; if they believed those who did not trust in Christ as Savior would spend eternity in a place called Hell; if they believed small groups and/or discipleship classes were an important part of biblical literacy; whether obedience to what Scripture teaches is extremely important; if they believed a believer in Christ should win the lost and live a lifestyle in harmony with the Gospel of Christ.

Christian Response Demographics

There were 334 total respondents to the survey. Three-hundred nineteen respondents self-identified as Christian and 15 self-identified as non-Christian. From the 319 who responded as a self-identified Christian, 46 did not complete the remainder of the survey. There were 273 self-identified Christians who answered all the questions created for the Christian categories. For the purposes of this project, the focus was placed on those who self-identified as Christian, while the non-Christian data was used for comparison only. The first 9 questions were demographical in nature, in order to get an understanding of what groups of people responded and to help broaden

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238 Questions for each category are listed in order beginning with Question #10 which asked the Christian to identify with a denomination/group.
the conclusions drawn from the questions. The first 9 questions are broken up into two sets: one for self-identified Christians and one set for non-Christians (see below). As mentioned, the total Christian responses were 319, with 273 answering questions 11 through 39.

**Christian Responses**

*Figure 1 What is Your Age Group?*

**Q# 1: What is your age group?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. 18-23 – Generation Z</td>
<td>2.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 24-38 – Millennials</td>
<td>12.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 39-53 – Generation X</td>
<td>24.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 54-72 – Baby Boomers</td>
<td>52.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. 73+ – Silent Generation</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2 Education*

**Q# 2: What is your educational background?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. No College</td>
<td>6.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Some College</td>
<td>30.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. College Graduate</td>
<td>63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3 General View of Religion*

**Q# 3: What is your view of Religion in general?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Religion is very important</td>
<td>77.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Religion is fairly important</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Religion is not important</td>
<td>4.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4 What is Your Gender?*

**Q# 4: What is your gender?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Woman</td>
<td>59.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Man</td>
<td>40.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women self-identified as Christian who said religion is very important were 78% (149 of 191). 73% of men said religion was very important to them (99). Women also made up 53% of college graduates (107), while men who graduated from college were the remaining 47% (94).
Figure 5 Where Do You Live?

**Q# 5: Where do you live?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Southeastern United States</td>
<td>55.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Northeastern United States</td>
<td>11.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Midwestern United States</td>
<td>17.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Southwestern United States</td>
<td>10.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Northwestern United States</td>
<td>5.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Outside the United States</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 176 living in the Southeastern United States, 149 say religion is very important to them (85%). Of the 36 living in the Northeast 23 say religion is very important (64%). Those living in the Midwest say religion is very important for 38 (68%). In the Southwest religion is very important to 25 (78%). And in the Northwest religion is very important to 12 (67%).

Figure 6 What is Your Race?

**Q# 6: What is your race?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Caucasian</td>
<td>86.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. African American</td>
<td>5.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Latino</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.013%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. European</td>
<td>0.013%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 Household Income

**Q# 7: What is your household income?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Under $50K?</td>
<td>35.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. $50K to $99K</td>
<td>41.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. $100K or more</td>
<td>22.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those with household incomes under $50,000 were 71% women (80); and 29% men (33). 56% (65) had some or no college education, while 34% (38) were college graduates.

Respondents with income between $50,000 and $90,000 with some or no college were 51% (37), while those with college degrees with income between $50,000 and $90,000 were 72% (96).
Women made up 62% of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} group (82), while men were 38% of that group (31). Incomes over $100,000 were predominantly college degreeed with 78% (57).

\textit{Figure 8 Marital Status}

\textbf{Q# 8: If you are married, how long?}

\begin{tabular}{l|c|c}
\textbf{Answer Choices} & \textbf{Responses} \\
\hline
a. Never married & 12.85\% & 41 \\
b. Divorced & 12.85\% & 41 \\
c. Widowed & 8.15\% & 26 \\
d. Less than 10 years & 10.34\% & 33 \\
e. 11-25 years & 22.25\% & 71 \\
f. Over 25 years & 33.54\% & 107 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & & 319 \\
\end{tabular}

\textit{Figure 9 Christian or Non-Christian}

\textbf{Q# 9: Do you consider yourself a…}

\begin{tabular}{l|c|c}
\textbf{Answer Choices} & \textbf{Responses} \\
\hline
a. Christian & 95.50\% & 319 \\
b. Non-Christian & 4.50\% & 15 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & & 334 \\
\end{tabular}

Self-identified Christians who were Generation Z (18-23) and said religion was very important to them made up 71\% of their age group (5 of 7). Millennials who said religion was very important were 82\% of their age group (32 of 38). Generation X respondents who said religion was very important were 82\% of their age group (64 of 78). Baby Boomers who said religion was very important were 77\% of their age group (129 of 167). Finally, the Silent Generation who said religion was very important were 64\% of their age group (18 of 28).

\textit{Figure 10 What Group of Christians Do You Identify With?}

\textbf{Q# 10: Do you consider yourself…}

\begin{tabular}{l|c|c}
\textbf{Answer Choices} & \textbf{Responses} \\
\hline
a. Evangelical Christian (Denominational) & 43.96\% & 120 \\
b. Non-Denominational & 31.50\% & 86 \\
c. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian & 10.62\% & 29 \\
d. Catholic & 7.33\% & 20 \\
e. Episcopalian & 3.66\% & 10 \\
f. Presbyterian & 2.93\% & 8 \\
\hline
\textbf{Total} & & 273 \\
\end{tabular}

Forty percent (48) of those who identified as Evangelical were Caucasian women. Forty-nine percent (59) were Caucasian men. Three percent who identified as Evangelical were
African-American (2 women, 2 men), while Caucasians, who identified as non-Denominational, consisted of 80% (74). 53% were Caucasian women (46); 33% were Caucasian men (28). non-Denominational African-Americans made up 8% (7). Latinos were only 3%.

Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians were made up of 86% Caucasians (25) and 14% African-Americans (4). Catholics were made up of 70% (14) Caucasians, 25% (5) Latino, and 5% (1) European. Episcopalians were 100% Caucasian. Presbyterians were 63% (5) Caucasian, 13% (1) Latino, and 25% (2) Asian or Pacific Islander. Overall Caucasians made up 86% (235) of self-identified Christians. The remainder nationalities made up 5% or less of the total.

**Benchmark Legend:**

Because the benchmarks are not in order of the questions presented in the survey, below are the benchmarks matched with the figure they are associated.

BM #1 - Fig. 11  
BM #2 - Fig. 20  
BM #3 - Fig. 21  
BM #4 - Fig. 12  
BM #5 - Fig. 13  
BM #6 - Fig. 14  
BM #7 - Fig. 22  
BM #8 - Fig. 24  
BM #9 - Fig. 25  
BM #10 - Fig. 26  
BM #11 - Fig. 27  
BM #12 - Fig. 17

**Beliefs About the Bible**

*Figure 11 BM #1: What Do You Believe About the Bible?*

**Q# 12: What do you believe about the Bible?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The Bible is the actual Word of God to be taken literally word for word.</td>
<td>36.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>The Bible is inspired by God, has no errors, some verses are meant to be symbolic.</strong></td>
<td>53.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The Bible is just another book of teachings written by men that contain stories and advice.</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-hundred respondents believe the Bible to be literally true word for word. Of that group Evangelicals made up 52%, non-Denominationals made up 28%, and Pentecostals made up 8%. A majority of all groups chose the answer describing the Bible as containing verses
meant to be symbolic. Evangelicals made up 44%, with non-Denominational believers making up 32% and Pentecostals making up 15%. The correct response for this survey, identified in bold, is that God’s Word is inspired with some verses meant to be symbolic. While a 3rd of respondents did not choose the correct response, it is possible there may be some confusion in that those who consider the Word of God to be literally true word for word would also agree with the statement that the Book of Revelation is filled with symbolic language.239

Figure 12 BM #4: The Bible Provides A Greater Sense of Purpose

Q# 16: I believe a better understanding of what the Bible teaches will give me a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>22.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. <strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td><strong>71.43%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 273

In Barna’s 2016 survey on the Bible, there was a rising skepticism in believing the Bible can be used as a guide to a meaningful life. There was also a generational difference in answers.240 The survey for this project did not have multiple years of data to compare. However, while these results showed a higher percentage who did not trust the Bible for guidance was with Generation X (28%) and Baby Boomers (47%), Generation Z (18-23) had the most significant percentage among their peers who do not believe the Bible is valuable for guidance (49%).

Figure 13 BM #5: The Bible is Divinely Inspired and God's Revelation to Man

Q#17: The Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to mankind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>1.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>16.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. <strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td><strong>78.75%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 273


240 The Bible in America, 57.
Evangelicals made up 50% (107) of Biblically engaged Christians who strongly agreed that the Bible is divinely inspired and is God’s revelation to humankind. Those who identify as non-Denominational made up 29%, and Pentecostal/Charismatics made up 13%. Catholics were 4% while Episcopalians and Presbyterians both wrapped the responses with 2% each.

Figure 14 BM #6: Without Trusting Jesus People Will Spend Eternity in Hell

Q# 18: Do you believe those who do not trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior will spend eternity in a place called Hell?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. No, everyone goes to Heaven when they die.</td>
<td>18.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Yes, unbelievers who reject Christ will spend eternity in Hell</td>
<td>81.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>273</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty-eight percent (108) of Biblically engaged Christians who agreed that unbelievers would spend an eternity in Hell were Evangelicals. Thirty percent (66) were non-Denominational, with Pentecostal/Charismatics rounding up the higher numbers with 13% (29). Among their peers, Evangelicals scored highest with 90%. Seventy-seven percent of non-Denominational and 49% of Pentecostal/Charismatics were Biblically engaged on this question. Among Catholics, 20% agreed. Thirty percent of Episcopalians and 25% of Presbyterians agreed.

Figure 15 The Bible Teaches that God is 3 in 1 (Trinity)

Q# 19: Do you believe the Bible teaches the Trinitarian nature (3 in 1) of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes</td>
<td>96.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. No</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>273</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16 Saved by Grace Alone Without Works

Q# 27: Christians are saved by God’s Grace, outside of their own works or ability to earn God’s favor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>11.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>78.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The doctrine of grace, salvation without works, is an essential concept among evangelicals and is essential for all believers to grasp. The survey reveals, however, that 22% (50) of self-identified Christians only agreed somewhat or disagreed either somewhat or strongly. Of those who could not agree strongly, 82% (49) were Caucasian (29 women and 20 men). 40% of respondents who agreed somewhat or disagreed were non-Denominational. Eighteen percent were Catholic. Evangelicals made up 13%, with the remaining spread between Pentecostals, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians.

Figure 17 BM #12: Holy Spirit is Fully Divine and Illuminates Scripture

Q# 28: The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine, who illuminates the Scriptures and guides believers to fulfill God’s will.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. <strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td>78.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 273

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His role in illuminating and guiding through the Scriptures is a central concept for Christians. The doctrine was disputed in the first several centuries of the Church. Nevertheless, it is a doctrine that should be important to believers. In the survey, those who only agreed somewhat or disagreed were over 21% of self-identified Christians. As with the other questions in the survey which are crucial for believers, this should be a concern for Church leaders.

Discipleship / Spiritual Disciplines

Figure 18 Church Attendance

Q# 11: How often do you attend church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Weekly</strong></td>
<td>62.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. A few weeks a month</td>
<td>9.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Once a month</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 273
Although church attendance cannot be the only measurement for a spiritually-mature believer, it does provide insight when laid beside other Bible-engagement issues. In this survey, a majority of self-identified Christians attended church weekly (62%). Within the majority, 55% (93) were Evangelicals. Twenty-four percent (41) were non-Denominational, and 13% (22) were Pentecostal/Charismatic.

Figure 19 How Many Bibles Are Owned?

Q# 13: How many Bibles are in your household?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I do not own a Bible</td>
<td>4.03% 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1-3 Bibles</td>
<td>45.05% 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 4-6 Bibles</td>
<td>28.94% 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 7+ Bible</td>
<td>21.98% 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this survey, 4% of self-identifying Christians said they did not own a Bible, which is an alarming statistic. Seven of the eleven (64%) say they never attend church, while the remaining four say they only attend a few times a year. The religious affiliation of the eleven included all six groups.

Figure 20 BM #2: Reading the Bible Outside of Religious Service

Q# 14: How often do you read a Bible on your own, not including times at a church/religious function?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Every day</td>
<td>38.10% 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. A few times a week</td>
<td>20.88% 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. A few times a month</td>
<td>10.99% 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Once a month</td>
<td>1.10% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. A few times a year</td>
<td>16.95% 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Never</td>
<td>12.09% 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses represent self-identified Christians, and yet 42% (72) read the Bible at most a few times a month; at worst, they never read the Bible. Unfortunately, the respondents
were not questioned on why they are not regular readers of the Bible. Barna did ask in their survey what respondents considered reasons to a decrease in Bible reading. The highest answer given was lack of time and life’s responsibilities.241

*Figure 21 BM #3: Has Personal Use of Bible Increased or Decreased?*

**Q# 15:** Would you say that your personal use of the Bible has increased, decreased, or is about the same as a year ago?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Stayed the same</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Increased</strong></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Decreased</td>
<td>9.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Not sure</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eighty-seven percent (238) of self-identified Christians said their personal use of the Bible either remained the same or increased. Within that group, 47% (111) were Evangelicals, with roughly half women or men (47% to 53%). Non-Denominational responses were 30% (71), and 11% Pentecostal/Charismatics.

*Figure 22 BM #7: Part of Discipleship Class That Teaches Bible Principles*

**Q# 20:** I am part of a discipleship class/small group that teaches me the principles of the Bible and how to incorporate it into my daily life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>46.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>No</strong></td>
<td>53.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discipleship questions scored the lowest of all survey questions for self-identified Christians. While 74% said they had attended or were currently attending a small group, there were no specifics on the makeup of the groups. In fact, when asked if small groups were necessary for Bible literacy and spiritual growth, the majority responded in the negative. (see Figures 23 thru 25 below).

---

241 Ibid., 108.
Have You Ever Attended a Christian Small Group?

Q# 21: Have you in the past, or are you now attending a Christian small group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>73.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>26.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 273

Small Groups Are Important to Biblical Literacy

Q# 22: Small Group attendance is very important to Biblical literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree strongly</strong></td>
<td>5.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>16.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>46.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td>32.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 273

Small Groups Are Necessary for Spiritual Growth

Q# 23: Small Group attendance is necessary for Spiritual growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree strongly</strong></td>
<td>11.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>20.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>43.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td>25.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 273

Obedience to Scripture is Very Important

Q# 24: Obedience to what the Scriptures teach is extremely important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree strongly</strong></td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>6.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>20.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td>69.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 273

Important to Win the Lost by Words and Lifestyle

Q# 26: It is my responsibility as a believer in Jesus Christ to seek to constantly win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle in harmony with the Gospel of Christ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree strongly</strong></td>
<td>5.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disagree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>13.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree somewhat</strong></td>
<td>26.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agree strongly</strong></td>
<td>55.68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 273
The responses to the Discipleship/Spiritual Discipline questions reveal heart and understanding issues on the importance of the Bible and Bible literacy to the believer. Although a majority of self-identified Christians answered that obedience to Scripture is very important (69%), just a little over half (55%) agreed strongly that it was the Christian’s responsibility to win the lost through words and lifestyle. When asked whether memorizing Scripture was important, only 37% agreed strongly. Forty-four percent said they agreed somewhat and 20% said it was not important at all.

Almost 80% of self-identified Christians said they pray every day. However, when correlated with the other spiritual disciplines such as the regular reading of the Bible, church attendance, memorizing Scripture, or winning the lost, that number drops to 22% (61).

**Bible Knowledge**

The questions which follow were a simple test on general Bible knowledge considered by this author as worth knowing in the evangelical world. In the following graphs, the correct answers are set to bold.
Figure 30 By This All Will Know You Are My Disciples

Q# 25: Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. keep My commandments</td>
<td>22.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. have love for one another</td>
<td><strong>58.61%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. abide in Me</td>
<td>10.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. proclaim My name</td>
<td>5.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. None of the above</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 31 How Many Books in the Bible?

Q# 31: How many books are in the Bible?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. 27</td>
<td>8.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 39</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 66</td>
<td><strong>80.59%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 75</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 32 What Books Make Up The Pentateuch?

Q# 32: What books make up the Pentateuch?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy</td>
<td><strong>82.05%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, 1 &amp; 2 Kings, 1 &amp; 2 Chronicles</td>
<td>8.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Job, Psalm, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Ruth, and Esther</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 33 This Book of the Bible Does Not Mention God

Q# 33: This Book of the Bible does not mention the name of God one time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Esther</td>
<td><strong>71.06%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Corinthians</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 2 Chronicles</td>
<td>7.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Nehemiah</td>
<td>13.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 34 Hebrew Names of Daniel's Three Friends

Q# 34: What are the Hebrew names of the three friends of Daniel that were thrown in a furnace for refusing to worship the king?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Belteshazzar, Haran, and Potiphar</td>
<td>11.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Issachar, Simeon, and Zebulun</td>
<td>10.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah</td>
<td><strong>65.93%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Mordecai, Ahasuerus, and Jeconiah</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 35 Fill in The Blanks for Matthew 6:33**

Q# 35: Fill in the blanks: “But _____ first the _____ of God and His righteousness, and all these _____ shall be added to you.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. pray, things, Kingdom</td>
<td>0.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>seek, Kingdom, things</strong></td>
<td><strong>82.05%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. love, Kingdom, desires</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. seek, Glory, things.</td>
<td>13.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 36 Great Faith or Little Faith?**

Q# 36: Jesus once taught that only those with great faith would be able to receive anything from God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. True</td>
<td>39.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>False</strong></td>
<td><strong>60.44%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 37 He Was Set Free Instead of Jesus**

Q# 37: At Jesus’ trial before Pilate whom did Pilate set free instead of Jesus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Antiochus Epiphanes</td>
<td>1.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. John the Baptist</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. <strong>Barabbas</strong></td>
<td><strong>89.38%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Judas Iscariot</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 38 Redeemed from The Curse Of...**

Q# 38: Paul told the Galatians that Christians are redeemed from the curse of what?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Having to be perfect</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>The Law</strong></td>
<td><strong>62.64%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Living in sin</td>
<td>19.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Hell</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 39 Biblically engaged Christians**

**Biblically engaged Christians**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Beliefs About Bible</th>
<th>Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Bible Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>01%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>02%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Biblically engaged Christians are defined as those who self-identified as Christian and met the more stringent requirements for each of the questions asked. As noted earlier in the chapter, questions 11 through 38 were used to determine the Biblical literacy of respondents. Each percentage was determined by dividing those who met the criteria for Biblically engaged by the total number of self-identified Christians who answered all questions. The total number of Christians who met the Biblically engaged criteria for Category One, “Beliefs About the Bible,” was 192. The total number of Christians who met the Biblically engaged criteria for Category Two, “Spiritual Disciplines,” was 50. The total number of Christians who met the Biblically engaged criteria for Category Three, “Bible Knowledge,” was 53.

The non-Biblically engaged Christians were those who self-identified as Christian but did not meet the Biblically engaged criteria for each category as defined earlier. Non-engaged Christians did believe the Bible is divinely inspired, and the doctrine of the Trinity is found in the Bible. However, at the same time they denied the doctrine of eternal punishment in Hell for unbelievers. Only 9 out of 273 fully met the non-engaged category for spiritual disciplines. This does not imply that only 9 were non-engaged overall, but simply that they did not meet any of the 13 criteria in spiritual disciplines for Biblically engaged. Finally, for the Bible knowledge category, the Biblically non-engaged only correctly identified the answer for question 36 on whether Jesus taught that only those with great faith would receive anything from God. The remainder of the Bible knowledge questions were answered incorrectly.

Figure 40 Biblically engaged Christians Among Their Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Beliefs About Bible</th>
<th>Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Bible Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>01%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

192 out of 273    50 out of 273    53 out of 273
Figure 41 Evangelicals vs. Others on the Best Definition of the Bible

Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on the Best Definition of the Bible

Q#12: What do you believe about the Bible? (Ans. The Bible is inspired by God, has no errors, some verses are meant to be symbolic).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>44.13% 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>32.41% 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>14.48% 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>05.00% 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>01.37% 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>00.09% 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on the Bible Providing Purpose and Fulfillment in Life

Figure 42 Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Other on Purpose and Fulfillment

Q# 16: I believe a better understanding of what the Bible teaches will give me a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in life. (Ans: Agree Strongly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>50.85% 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>26.85% 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>14.85% 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>02.28% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>03.42% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>01.71% 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Others on Heaven and Hell

Figure 43 Biblically engaged Evangelicals vs. Other on Heaven and Hell

Q# 18: Do you believe those who do not trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior will spend eternity in a place called Hell? (Ans. Yes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>48.43% 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>29.59% 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>13.00% 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>04.03% 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>02.69% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>02.24% 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Biblically engaged Pastors

Figure 44 Biblically engaged Pastors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Bible Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Correct Choice for Q#12)</td>
<td>35.48%</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Evangelical (2nd Choice for Q#12)</td>
<td><strong>54.83%</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. B-E Pastors Overall</td>
<td>53.75%</td>
<td>34.50%</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to Benchmarks

The following data points represent how the Biblically engaged answered the twelve benchmarks (see the Benchmark Legend for a list of figures noting which questions were used as benchmarks). The percentages captured represent comparisons with each group’s peer totals (Evangelical totals are 120 out of 273; non-Denominational are 86; Pentecostal/Charismatics are 29; Catholics are 20; Episcopalians are 10 and Presbyterians are 8).

Figure 45 Biblically engaged Response to Benchmarks Among Their Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>BM#1</th>
<th>BM#2</th>
<th>BM#3</th>
<th>BM#4</th>
<th>BM#5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90%</strong></td>
<td><strong>97%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>BM#6</th>
<th>BM#7</th>
<th>BM#8</th>
<th>BM#9</th>
<th>BM#10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>66%</strong></td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
<td><strong>76%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>BM#11</th>
<th>BM#12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Evangelical (Denominational)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Non-Denominational</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pentecostal/Charismatic</td>
<td><strong>97%</strong></td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Catholic</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Episcopalian</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Presbyterian</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Non-Christian Responses

*Figure 46 Non-Christian Responses*

### Q# 1: What is your age group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f. 18-23 – Generation Z</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. 24-38 – Millennials</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. 39-53 – Generation X</td>
<td>53.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. 54-72 – Baby Boomers</td>
<td>26.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. 73+ - Silent Generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q# 2: What is your educational background?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. No College</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Some College</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. College Graduate</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q# 3: What is your view of Religion in general?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Religion is very important</td>
<td>26.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Religion is fairly important</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Religion is not important</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q# 4: What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. Woman</td>
<td>46.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Man</td>
<td>53.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q# 5: Where do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g. Southeastern United States</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Northeastern United States</td>
<td>26.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Midwestern United States</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Southwestern United States</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Northwestern United States</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Outside the United States</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q# 6: What is your race?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g. Caucasian</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. African American</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Latino</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6/66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. European</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q# 7: What is your household income?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Under $50K?</td>
<td>26/66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. $50K to $99K</td>
<td>26.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. $100K or more</td>
<td>46.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 8: If you are married, how long?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g. Never married</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Divorced</td>
<td>26.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Widowed</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Less than 10 years</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. 11-25 years</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Over 25 years</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 40: I believe in a Higher Power but not the God described in the Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 41: Who do you consider the most important religious leader in history?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Jesus Christ</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Buddha</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Mohamed</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Confucius</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Joseph Smith</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. No one</td>
<td>53.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 42: Religion should play a vital role in the lives of everyone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 43: Religion should be taught at every level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q# 44: I would identify myself as the following:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q# 45: What is your experience with Church?</td>
<td>a. Love it!</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Mostly good.</td>
<td>66.67% 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Not so great.</td>
<td>13.33% 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Never attended.</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# 46: Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and revealed the will of God to mankind.</td>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>40.00% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>33.33% 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>6.67% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# 47: I believe all religions lead to Heaven regardless of what they teach.</td>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>26.67% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>40.00% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>13.33% 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# 48: Religion is a panacea for people who cannot cope in real life.</td>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>40.00% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>20.00% 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# 49: I believe the World would be a safer place without Religion</td>
<td>a. Disagree strongly</td>
<td>26.67% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Disagree somewhat</td>
<td>40.00% 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Agree somewhat</td>
<td>20.00% 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Agree strongly</td>
<td>13.33% 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# 50: How often do you read a Bible on your own?</td>
<td>a. Every day</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. A few times a week</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. A few times a month</td>
<td>6.67% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Once a month</td>
<td>6.67% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Less than once a month</td>
<td>40.00% 6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Never</td>
<td>46.67% 7</td>
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Comparisons with the Census Bureau on Religious Affiliations.

*Figure 47 Census Bureau Religious Affiliation*
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Results of Survey and Conclusions

This project evaluated the current state of Bible literacy in American Christians with a goal to design a path for the local church, parachurch ministry, or individuals to improve Biblical literacy and encourage the kind of spiritual growth that will lead to fulfilling the Great Commission and Great Commandment. It is not an easy task to fulfill, for the local church or individual. However, it is a necessary task for those believers who long to see the Kingdom of God realized, and the Great Commission fulfilled. The survey revealed areas the church should bring focus in order to maintain and increase the prominence of God’s Word in the lives of believers. The twelve benchmarks show high regard for God’s Word by many of those self-identified Christians, while also revealing a lack of commitment to spiritual disciplines. Those benchmark survey questions that required an acknowledgment of doctrine were higher than those which require action on the part of the believer. However, the benchmarks also provide hope for transformed lives. As the survey results are evaluated, and conclusions are drawn, the project provides a simple action to be taken for the Church to stem the tide of Biblical illiteracy and increase the impact of discipleship.

Self-Identified Christians and Bible Engagement

The survey revealed a lack of Biblical literacy among self-identified Christians which, in part, can be attributed to a growing lack of Bible engagement. The questions for this project which focused on the attitude, or beliefs, of respondents toward the value of the Bible in the life of today’s believer, reveal an uncomfortable percentage who do not hold the traditional

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242 The average for the percentage of correct answers on the beliefs about the Bible was forty-eight percent; while the average for the percentage of correct answers for spiritual disciplines was only twelve percent. This discrepancy lead to the average for the percentage of correct answers on Bible knowledge being only eleven percent.

views of evangelical Christianity. The benchmark questions also reveal a low percentage of believers who recognize the need for the spiritual disciplines. The pastor who understands this also sees a great need for a revival in seeking Biblical literacy among believers. Coupled with those benchmarks the low percentage of self-identified Christians who see little need for spiritual disciplines, and the Christian pastor recognizes the great need for a revival in seeking Biblical literacy among believers.244

The first group of benchmark questions focused on beliefs about the Bible. Benchmark #1 (Figure 11), begins the survey asking what self-identified Christians believe about the Bible. As discussed in Chapter 4, the correct answer is the Bible is inspired by God and has no errors; some verses are meant to be symbolic. Of all the benchmark questions, this opening question was more evenly divided between the correct answer and those who believe the Bible is the actual Word of God to be taken word for word literally. The good news is that both answers speak to the Bible as God’s divinely inspired word. Those two groups add up to almost 90% of the total respondents. However, as the survey progressed and more specific questions were answered, self-identified Christians moved away from the traditional evangelical stance. It should be noted that this question was chosen as it matches the nationally-provided survey question completed by The Barna Group, and this writer felt it offered a good starting point.

Benchmark #4 (Figure #12) asks: Does a better understanding of the Bible give one a great sense of purpose and fulfillment in life? Traditional evangelicals would answer this in a strong affirmative. However, only 71% of respondents strongly agreed, while 22% agreed somewhat. Almost 30% of self-identified Christians did not meet the Biblically engaged

244 One recent study by Barna reveals that post-Christian America is growing, as there is a general reluctance “to engage in spiritual conversations, an aversion to evangelism and the erosion of religious belief and practice.” https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-2019/
category for a fundamental belief that the Bible should hold a primary place in the Christian’s life in determining their purpose and finding fulfillment.

Benchmark #5 (Figure #13) asked whether one believes in the inspiration of the Bible and is it God’s revelation of Himself to making. Less than 79% agreed strongly, with Evangelicals making up 50% of the group agreeing strongly, and non-Denominational making up 29%. There was almost 2% of self-identified Christians who disagreed strongly with that statement and 3% who disagreed somewhat. Of those who disagreed (12 out of 273), all were Caucasian, with one Evangelical, five non-Denominational, two Presbyterian, and three Catholic. These numbers show that non-Evangelicals are more likely to hold a view that the Bible is not God’s inspired Word.

Benchmark #6 (Figure #14) asks whether unbelievers go to an eternal hell. Out of the 273 self-identified Christians that answered, 50 (18.32%) answered no, believing instead that everyone goes to Heaven when they die. Of those 50, the largest group were non-Denominational (40%, or 20), indicating those in this group may not be practicing Christians but merely identify with the faith. Among the 72% (223) who agreed with that statement, 56% were women (125), and 44% were men (98). This statistic can, of course, be quite disturbing from a Biblically-based perspective. The Scripture clearly teaches the doctrine of eternal punishment for those who reject Christ, with Christ declaring it Himself in Matthew 7:13-14. Is the Church in the place today where almost 20% of self-identified Christian no longer believe in eternal punishment because the message is not being preached? Could the reason be that many today are Biblically illiterate and do not know what the Bible teaches? Or is it merely a matter of rejection of the Biblical message by those consumed with their own self-interest and lack of Bible literacy?
Benchmark #10 (Q# 24) asked, “Is obedience to what Scripture teaches extremely important?” This writer chose to use this question to gauge both beliefs about the Bible and Spiritual Disciplines, as it is necessary for both areas. Those who agreed strongly with this statement were less than 70% of self-identified Christians 69.23% (189). Of those who agreed strongly, 36% (99) were Evangelical, 19% (51) were non-Denominational, and 9% (25) were Pentecostal/Charismatic. The remaining 5% were divided evenly between Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Catholic.

Benchmark #10 gauges the intent of whether Christians today believe obedience to Scripture is necessary. This is one of the imperatives addressed under spiritual disciplines which brings significant focus on why Christians today are not fearful of disobeying the commands of Scripture or seeking to be more Christ-like. Comments heard today by some self-identified Christians include why the Church must seek to love the sinful rather than correct their actions, or that Christ would not disapprove of the sinful lifestyles of many, even when Scripture clearly speaks against those sins. Some of these questions will be addressed when survey answers to spiritual disciplines are reviewed.

Self-Identified Christians and Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines were the 2nd group of benchmarks and provide a disappointing view into the lives of Western self-identified Christians who reveal that right believing may not always lead to right doing. The first benchmark on spiritual disciplines was #2; figure #20: How often does the self-identified Christian read their Bible outside of a church/religious function? Thirty-eight percent (104) said they read their Bible every day, while 32% (87) said they read their Bible from a few times a week to a few times a month. These three answers were categorized as Biblically engaged for a total of 70% (191 of 273). The remaining responses are disappointing when one realizes these are self-identified Christians who say they only ready their
Bible from once a month (3), to a few times a year (46), to never reading their Bible (33). These numbers (a total of 82, or 30%), represent individuals who present themselves to the world as Christians, are probably convinced they are Christians, and yet, have little to no knowledge of Scripture.

Benchmark #3 (Figure #21) is the 2nd survey on spiritual disciplines. Has the personal use of the self-identified Christian’s Bible increased or decreased in the last year? One-third (91) said their use has increased, while 54% (147) said their use remains the same. Almost 13% (35) said their use had decreased, or they were not sure. Further clarification would have been helpful for those who said their use had increased (e.g., What was their current use? Daily? Weekly?). The majority of respondents said their use had remained the same but were not asked to define what their use was or how much it had increased.

The 3rd benchmark for spiritual disciplines (Benchmark #7, Figure #22) asked if the self-identified Christian was part of a small group that teaches Biblical principles and how to incorporate the Bible into their daily lives. This was a simple yes or no question. Sadly, the majority (53%, or 146 responses), said they were not part of such a group. A follow-up question that was not a benchmark question (Figure #23) asked if the Christian had ever been, or were currently, part of a small group. Seventy-four percent (202) said they were or had been part of a group in the past. The conclusion is that either small groups are not using the opportunity to encourage the primacy of the Bible in the lives of Christians or are doing a poor job incorporating the Bible into small group lessons.

Is attending small groups very important to Biblical literacy? Most of the respondents did not believe so. Only 32% (89) agreed strongly, with the largest group only agreeing somewhat (46%, or 126). Some responses could be attributed to churches not utilizing small groups to increase Bible literacy, an observation which prompted this dissertation. But the good news is
that it reveals an opportunity for the future development of Christ-followers who know and live the Word of God in the local church. With 74% responding they are open to being part of small groups, a campaign to reignite interest in reading the Bible regularly and increasing Bible literacy should be a renewed focus.245

Benchmark #9 (Figure #25) asked the respondents whether small group attendance is necessary for spiritual growth. An even smaller group agreed strongly than in Benchmark #8. Twenty-five percent (69) agreed strongly. As with the previous question, there was a higher response who agreed somewhat (43%, 118). Again, one-third disagreed somewhat (20%, 55) or disagreed strongly (11%, 31). Several factors could explain these answers. First, today’s self-identified Christian is satisfied with the large-group worship experience and may receive good teaching in the larger services. Second, one believes his or her spiritual needs are met with the large group. Third, today’s self-identified Christian seeks to avoid the exposure that comes from Christian relationships in a small group.

The individualism of today’s world has infiltrated the Church and poisoned much of what the early Church held dear—family and relationships. Gene Getz’s experience with one seminary student is indicative of the attitude of many self-identified Christians today. The student said in the classroom setting, “Who needs the church…Perhaps God is going to bypass the church in order to carry out the Great Commission?”246 The student’s implication was clear. God does not need the Church to complete His mission. He can use individuals without the ecclesiastical structure. But Getz points out the New Testament challenge by Paul to the Ephesians that they walk worthy of their calling to grow from spiritual infancy to maturity (Eph 4:1).247

245 The conclusions drawn from this survey reveal the need to increase Bible reading; which will, in turn, increase Bible literacy. While that may appear to be an over-simplification, still, it is a worthy goal for every church and church leader.


247 Ibid., 99.
Today’s Christian must walk unencumbered from all things that would pull the Church from maturity in Christ. The pull of social media and technology evidences this need daily. The author of Hebrews reminded the first-century Christian to keep their eye on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our faith.248 A regular Bible reading program designed to restore Biblical literacy can provide the foundation necessary to see these two lessons of faith come to pass for today’s believer.

Finally, in the spiritual disciplines category, self-identified Christians are asked whether believers in Jesus Christ should seek to continually win the lost to Christ (Figure #27). Even though the majority agreed, it was just over half (55%, 152). This means that 45% of self-identified Christians did not agree strongly that obedience to the Great Commission was necessary for today’s believer. Could a re-wording of the statement have improved the responses? Perhaps some took offense with agreeing that believers should win the lost “constantly.” That could explain why 26% agreed somewhat, rather than strongly. When this benchmark is compared with benchmark #10 (Obedience to Scripture is extremely important), those who agreed strongly on both benchmarks dropped 14% (189 vs. 152).

The survey supports the belief that a lack of Bible engagement results in a lack of concern for spiritual disciplines. If the believer holds views towards God’s Word that minimizes God’s influence in their lives, Jesus’ words ring true: “And He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin…because they do not believe in Me.”249 Reading God’s Word will lead to His Words being incorporated into one’s life. Ultimately, this will lead to a Biblically engaged believer, who is not just a believer but a faithful follower of Christ.250

248 Ibid., 104-05.
249 John 16:8-9 NASB [emphasis added].
250 The Lordship Salvation espoused by some is not within the purview of this paper. However, while this writer does not agree with the concept of Lordship Salvation, raising Christ-followers, and not just believers, should be an imperative for today’s Church. This survey revealed that many are comfortable with just believing, and not acting.
Believers should understand the centrality of the Bible and have a desire to pursue a vibrant, meaningful experience with the Bible. Several benchmarks in the survey were specifically designed to determine the value self-identified Christians hold of the Bible. The results, however, were disappointing, as self-identified Christians consistently responded to a foundational belief in the importance of God’s Word but showed decreasing interest in actually engaging with the Bible on a daily basis. Next, the responses to the general knowledge of the Bible are discussed.

**Self-Identified Christians and Bible Knowledge**

The survey questions which focused on general Bible knowledge were not part of the twelve benchmarks; they were used to find any correlations that may exist between one’s attitude towards the Bible, one’s commitment to spiritual disciplines, and general Bible knowledge. Compared with beliefs about the Bible and commitment to spiritual disciplines, knowledge of some basic questions on well-known stories or passages of Scripture scored relatively close with the results on spiritual disciplines. Overall, only 20% (54) out of 273 self-identified Christians answered all the questions for Bible knowledge correctly.

One should probably not make the correlation that a poor score on knowledge of Bible narratives and teachings should automatically lead to an assumption that one is lying about being a Christ-follower. Neither should a good score indicate that one is fully committed to Christ. Variables such as the length of one’s salvation and whether they were raised in an atmosphere that emphasized Biblical traditions play a part. There is a root problem among self-identified Christians, however, if their faith in Christ goes no further than a weekly attendance to worship or participation in a small group that neither emphasizes God’s Word nor disciples believers.

**Overall Survey Conclusions**
Figure #39 reveals Biblically engaged Christians by religious affiliation. One-hundred ninety-two self-identified Christians qualified as Biblically engaged (70%) in evangelical beliefs about the Bible. That number dropped dramatically when self-identified Christians responded to both the spiritual disciplines and knowledge of the Bible surveys. Only 50 out of the 273 (18%) respondents qualified as Biblically engaged in spiritual disciplines. The survey revealed that only 53 out of the 273 (19%) qualified as Biblically engaged in their knowledge of Biblical narratives and teachings.

Pentecostal/Charismatics scored highest in all three categories when compared with their religious peers (Figure #40). One hundred percent of Pentecostal/Charismatics were Biblically engaged in their beliefs about the Bible, 52% were engaged in spiritual disciplines, and 48% answered all the Bible knowledge questions correctly. Evangelicals came in 2nd in each category (86%, 47%, and 35% respectively). Two-thirds of those who identified as non-Denominational (64%) were Biblically engaged in their beliefs about the Bible. Their numbers dropped dramatically in spiritual disciplines (9%), while only one-fifth (19%) of those who identified as non-Denominational answered all Bible knowledge questions correctly.

Several survey questions were particularly crucial in gauging how self-identified Christians stood in their beliefs. Figure #41 (from Question #12 on the best definition of the Bible) compares Evangelicals with the other religiously affiliated groups. When asked if the Bible is inspired by God, has no errors, and has some verses that are meant to be symbolic, 64 of the 145 who answered correctly were Evangelicals. That was less than half of those who answered correctly (44.13%), and 53% of those who identified as Evangelicals. Forty-seven (54.65%) of 86 non-Denominational answered correctly. Again, that was roughly half among their peers. Twenty-one Pentecostal/Charismatics answered question #12 correctly (14.48%). This was a more significant percentage among their peers of any group (21 of 29 or 72.41%).
Catholics who answered correctly (7) were 35% of their peers. Five out of ten Episcopalians (50%) were correct, and one out of eight (12.5%) Presbyterians were correct. So, once again, as in the overall scores, Pentecostal/Charismatic respondents scored highest among their peers.

Figure #42 (Question #16) compared Evangelicals with others on their beliefs that the Bible gives purpose and fulfillment in life. Eighty-nine Evangelicals agreed strongly out of 175 (64% of the self-identified Christians). Those 89 are 74% of the 120 self-identified Evangelicals. The remaining 49% included 47 non-Denominational; 26 Pentecostal/Charismatic; 4 Catholic, 6 Episcopalians, and 3 Presbyterians. Once again, the Pentecostal/Charismatics were the largest among their peers (26 of 29) with 90%. Non-Denominationals came in 2nd with 55% among their peers. Evangelicals ranked with 51%.

Finally, Figure #43 (Question #18) compared Evangelicals with all others on the question of whether there is an eternal Hell for unbelievers. The total number of self-identified Christians who answer “Yes” was 223. That was 82% of the 273 self-identified Christians. Among the correct answers, Evangelicals were less than half with 48% (108). Non-Denominationals were 30% (66) the total, with Pentecostal/Charismatics among the top three again with 13% (29).

However, the real distinction can be seen when each group is compared among their peers. One hundred percent (29 of 29) of the Pentecostal/Charismatic group answered the Heaven/Hell question correctly. Evangelicals came in 2nd in this survey question with 90% (108 of 120) answering correctly. Non-Denominationals rounded out the top three with 77% of their 86 answering correctly.

Pastors Among The Respondents

Dr. Dave Earley, addressing what the will of God is for today’s believer, said, “Be a Disciple and Make Disciples! Orient your life around the Great Commission.”

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251 Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 2.
project’s survey revealed that self-identified Christians do not make discipleship and winning the lost priorities. This could also be a reflection on pastors and churches.

Those who identified as a pastor in this project survey, a total of 39, did not score much higher in the three categories from those not in full-time ministry (See Figure #44). Seventy-nine percent, (31 of 39), identified as Evangelical pastors, 6 identified as non-Denominational, and 2 identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic. With regards to Evangelical pastors, an intriguing result is found with Question #12. When Evangelicals answered what they believed about the Bible, the responses were almost split, between the correct answer that there are parts that are symbolic (14 of 31) and those who believe the Bible should be taken literally word-for-word (17 of 31).

Because of this, the survey results (found in Figure #44) were split between the two different responses in Question #12 and results tallied from the separate, original answer. For those who chose the correct answer for #12 and chose the correct answers in both spiritual disciplines and Bible knowledge, only one pastor could be identified as Biblically engaged out of 31 Evangelical pastors. That result may be negligible for the overall survey, but when the impact of the pastor’s leadership in the local church is considered, it has considerable ramifications. When the 2nd response for Question #12 was chosen, the Bible is the literal Word of God word-for-word, the remaining benchmark responses improved to 47% (8 out of 17). Evangelical pastors who believe the Bible to be the literal Word of God word-for-word also hold to the traditional values. These are represented by the spiritual disciplines in the survey and are more Biblically literate as seen by their responses to the Bible knowledge questions.

American Bible Society Survey vs. Project Survey

This project’s survey questions mirrored some of those given by the ABS in their 2019 State of the Bible survey. The Bible Society categorized those most engaged with the Bible as

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252 See Figures 22, 24 and 25 on Discipleship. See Figure 27 on Winning the Lost.
Bible Centered. In this Bible Centered group are those who have a consistent interaction with the Bible, that shapes people’s choices and transforms their relationships.\textsuperscript{253} Within that group (5% of the population), a majority were married women from the Baby Boomer and Gen X generations, 46 years old on average, and reside in the South. Bible Engaged and Bible Friendly was roughly 40% of the population. In comparison, the overall percentage of respondents to this project categorized as Biblically engaged were also women (54% or 104 out of 192)

\textbf{Origins of the Bible}

Most respondents for this project (53%, or 145 of 273) answered that they believe the Bible to be inspired by God, has no errors, and some verses are meant to be symbolic. This writer identified this answer as an evangelically correct answer for several reasons. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:16 that “\textit{All Scripture is inspired by God} and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”\textsuperscript{254} The clear implication is that God’s Word was written by men whose words were “God-breathed.”\textsuperscript{255} Symbolic passages of Jesus’ teachings (His parables) and of Him alone are clearly symbolic.\textsuperscript{256} Thirty-seven percent (100) answered that the Bible is the actual Word of God to be taken word for word literally. And while a disappointingly large number of self-identified Christians believe the Bible to be just another book of teachings written by men (10%, or 28), the focus here is to compare this survey’s results on beliefs about the Bible with the national surveys between 2011 and 2019 completed by the Barna Group in conjunction with the ABS.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[254] Emphasis added.
\item[255] The translation of the Greek word \textit{theopneustos} is literally “God-breathed”, and only occurs this one time in the New Testament.
\item[256] Vine and branches (John 15:1,5); Word of God is a Seed (Mark 4:2-11); Lion and Lamb (Rev 5:5 and 12:11)
\end{footnotes}
The ABS survey of 2019 offered five different ways of describing the Bible, with more adults believing the Bible to be *inspired* (with some symbolism) than *literal*. Thirty percent of ABS respondents agreed with this project’s assertion that the Bible is inspired, without error, with some parts clearly meant to be symbolic. This is a large discrepancy between surveys as 53% of this project’s respondents agreed with the *inspired* vs. the *literal* belief of the Bible. However, the sampling accuracy between the two surveys could play a part. This project’s respondents totaled three-hundred nineteen, while the ABS survey respondents totaled 1,001 telephone interviews and 1,012 online respondents. The Bible Society’s report advised that a participation group of 300 leads to a sampling accuracy of plus or minus 5.8% when responses are 45% or 55%. This leads to a result of this project’s survey question on beliefs about the Bible at approximately 47%. A result which is closer to the national average.

**The Bible and a Purpose-Filled Life**

The results of this project’s survey reveal trends and results that line up somewhat with the six-year study on the state of the Bible in America, with its final report issued in 2019, by the Barna Group, commissioned by the ABS. The Bible Society asked whether respondents believed the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life. Those identified as Bible Centered (88%) or Engaged (82%) agreed strongly. This project’s assessment lined up closely with Barna’s 2019 survey, and was actually somewhat stronger, in that those who were asked to agree that a better understanding of what the Bible teaches will give one a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in life (see Figure # 12), agreed strongly (71% or 195), or agreed somewhat (22% or 61), for a total of 94% (256 of 273).

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258 Ibid., 3.
259 Ibid., 117.
The ABS asked respondents if they owned a Bible in a language the household understands. Four out of five households (84%) said they did own a Bible in a language the household understands. And while in this project that question was not posed, when asked how many Bibles self-identified Christians did own, 96% (262) said they owned one or more Bibles, with a slightly larger percentage of women (147 vs. 115) over men. Generationally, the Bible Society’s survey showed that that older generations (92% of Elders, and 85% of Baby Boomers) had a more significant percentage of Bibles owned in an understandable language. While this project did not take note of Bibles in a known language, the percentage of Bibles owned were mostly the same across the board with 71% of Gen Z, 88% of Gen X, 82% of Baby Boomers, and 75% of the Silent Generation. Millennials scored the lowest with only 61% owning one or more Bibles.

Benchmark #7 (see Figure #22) revealed another discrepancy between what self-identified Christians believe and practice. Respondents were asked if they were part of a small discipleship group that teaches the principles of the Bible and how to incorporate them in one’s daily life. Those responding with “yes” were just over 46% (127). Therefore, the majority were not part of the group that would encourage and guide one to spiritual maturity, even though 95% agreed that the Bible provides the necessary teaching to give one a meaningful life.

**Bible Knowledge Self-Assessment**

The ABS asked respondents to do a self-assessment of their knowledge of the Bible. Seventy-three percent professed some knowledge of the Bible, with 11% saying they were highly knowledgeable and 26% saying they were moderately knowledgeable. The Bible Society's survey found little difference between age groups in their self-assessments but did note that African Americans and adults who had not attended college answered that they had the highest in Bible knowledge.
In this project’s survey, a self-assessment of Bible knowledge was not taken, but this writer has already noted that there was a much smaller group who answered all Bible knowledge questions correctly. Millennials had the highest percentage among their peers who answered all questions correctly (11 of 39, or 28%). Seventeen percent of both Gen X and Baby Boomers answered all Bible knowledge questions correctly. Surprisingly, only 1 of 28 from the Silent Generation answered all questions correctly. There were none from Gen Z who answered all questions correctly. In deference of the ABS's results, this survey showed that both Caucasians and African Americans tied among their peers at 20% who successfully answered all the Bible knowledge questions.

Encouraging Bible reading to increase Biblical literacy is imperative if the 21st-century church in fulfilling its calling. In the 2019 State of the Bible report of the ABS, they note those who are more engaged with Scripture have an increasing appetite to use it.260 Among those who admitted regular use of their Bible, 47% of all Bible users from ABS’s survey are motivated to read it because it brings them closer to God.261 Among those the Bible Society’s survey identified as Bible-centered, 60% said reading their Bible brought them closer to God.

The Bible as Transformative

Those identified as Biblically engaged for this project were less likely to hold a higher view of the need for spiritual disciplines, as noted earlier in this chapter. The Bible Society asked its respondents to agree on whether the Bible has transformed their life. Twenty-six percent agreed strongly, while roughly 2 in 5 adults (42%) say the Bible has not transformed their lives.262 In addition, ABS’s survey continued to show, as with other categories in their report, a correlation between Bible engagement with race (African-Americans are more likely to report a

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260 Ibid., 11.
261 Ibid., 10.
262 Ibid., 20.
life transformed as a result of Bible use) as well as income levels (low to mid-income levels are more likely to report the Bible has transformed their lives, compared to income levels over $100,000).

Respondents in this project showed similar results. When asked if, as a self-identified Christian, one believes in the necessity of spiritual disciplines, the overall averages revealed that 47% of African Americans qualified as Biblically engaged with spiritual disciplines. Thirty percent or less of the other racial groups could be identified as Biblically engaged in spiritual disciplines. Results were similar when income levels are compared. The Bible Society noted that the low to the moderate-income group are more likely to report a transformed life through the Bible’s influence. Similarly, respondents to this project who reported incomes lower than $50,000 (44%), and $50,000 to $99,000 (40%), revealed that spiritual disciplines were influenced by their beliefs about the Bible. Only 16% (8 of 64) reporting income greater than $100,000 were considered Biblically engaged in spiritual disciplines. As with the ABS survey, the higher the income, the less likely respondents were to hold a traditionally evangelical view of Biblically engaged spiritual disciplines.

The Most Important Biblical Directive

The American Bible Society’s survey also presented a list of five Biblical directives and asked respondents to choose the one they believed is most important. Most respondents said that either to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God; or love for their neighbor was the most important directive (82%). To go and make disciples was chosen by only 8% (1 out of 12) of the ABS survey responses. This provides an interesting comparison with this project in that, while a majority (82%) agreed that those who do not trust in Christ as their Savior would spend eternity in Hell (see Figure #14), and 70% (189) said obedience to what Scripture teaches is

263 Ibid., 22.
extremely important (see Figure #26). Only 56% (152) strongly agreed that winning the lost is a Christian’s responsibility (see Figure #27). The Bible Society survey showed that even for the Biblically engaged and Bible friendly groups, half the respondents believed *doing justice, loving mercy, and walking with God* was a higher command than *loving one’s neighbor*. Millennial Bible and Bible Neutrals placed emphasis on taking care of the earth, over Biblically mandated commands.

**Women and Men**

There was no considerable gender gap with those identified as Biblically engaged in this survey. Biblically engaged women were 54% (104 of 192) and men were 46% (88 of 192) in the benchmark category of beliefs about the Bible. In spiritual disciplines, women again came out higher, but only by a few percentage points (52% vice 48% for men). The overall numbers, however, for the Biblically engaged in spiritual disciplines are dramatically lower than beliefs about the Bible. Out of 273 self-identified Christians, only 50 qualified as Biblically engaged in spiritual disciplines. And in that group, 26 were women, and 24 were men. The Biblically engaged with Bible knowledge were also low, as mentioned earlier, with only a total of 53. There were 24 women, and 29 were men.

In the ABS national survey, women consistently scored higher in all the categories they used to determine commitment to the Bible. The ABS survey identified those similar in commitments to respondents in this survey (those called Bible-engaged) as Bible-centered. This group was only 5% of the population but were more often than not adults who were married females, mainly from the Baby Boomer and Gen X generations, on average 46 years old, and reside in the South.\(^{264}\) While women are more likely than men to say they were unsure where to

\(^{264}\) Ibid., 6.
start in studying the Bible, men are more likely to feel a lack of excitement to read the Bible, and also more likely than women to say they don’t use the Bible.265

The ABS survey asked respondents whether they believed in Heaven and Hell, or spiritual energy located in physical things, such as mountains, trees, or crystals.266 Among women and men, 70% of women believe in Heaven, and only 58% believe in Hell. Sixty-two percent of men believe in Heaven, while only 55% believe in Hell. In this project’s survey, Question #18 asked respondents, more specifically, if one goes to Hell if they do not trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior (see Figure #14). Eighty-two percent (223 of 273) said they do believe in Hell as eternal punishment. Among that group, 56% were women (125 of 223), 44% (98 of 223) were men. Of course, this project’s question was more specific, asking respondents to agree in eternal punishment for those who reject Jesus Christ, while ABS’s survey merely asked if one believes in either reality.

Locations Within the United States

This project chose 5 regions within the United States for individuals to identify where they live. They were the Southeastern, Northeastern, Midwestern, Southwestern, and Northwestern regions. Using data from the Census Bureau from 2008 for comparison, the most recent year available,267 Americans self-identifying as Christians and living in Southeastern states were 35.6% of the population. Americans in Northeastern states were 23.5%. Americans in the Midwest were 21.5%. Southwestern states had 6%, and the Northwest had 13.4% of the United States who identified as Christian.
Respondents to this survey, who self-identified as Christians, broke down by regions in the following manner: The Southeastern United States self-identified Christians were 55% (150 of 273). The Northeastern United States self-identified Christians were 10% (28 of 273). The Midwestern United States self-identified Christians were 20% (54 of 273). The Southwestern United States self-identified Christians were 9.5% (26 of 273), and the Northwestern United States self-identified Christians were .5% (14 of 273).

In comparing the national Census Bureau results from 2008 with this project, some regional differences did arise. The Southeastern region for this project was 20% higher than the national average (35.6% nationally compared with 55%), while the Northeastern region for this project was a little less than half the national average (23.5% nationally compared with 10%). The Midwestern results were almost identical (21.5% nationally compared with 20%). The national average for the Southwestern region was 3% less than this project (6% nationally compared with 9.5%). Finally, the Northwestern region nationally was 13% while the results of this project from the Northwestern was quite less (.5%). While these comparisons do not negate the impact of this project’s survey, it does show some of its limitations.

Races

African Americans were consistently among the higher percentages in many of the ABS categories for Bible-centered Christians in their 2019 survey. In ABS’s surveys for overall knowledge of the Bible, African Americans and adults who had not attended college scored highest. African Americans were also more likely to believe the Bible is the actual Word of God (37%), while Hispanics were more likely to view the Bible as the inspired Word of God without errors (35%). African Americans also were less likely to disagree that the Bible

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influences their behavior and that the Bible influences individuals on civic issues. Additional survey questions specific to racial issues were also indicative of the African American community’s commitment to the Bible and God.

The results of the project’s survey questions revealed similar, but not consistent, results. For instance, while this project did not specify racial issues, among those who scored high enough to be considered Biblically engaged, African Americans were highest percentagewise in both beliefs about the Bible (87%) and spiritual disciplines (33%) when compared with their peers. Caucasians came in 2nd overall in beliefs about the Bible (71%) and spiritual disciplines (18%) among their peers. Latinos came in 3rd, with 57% Biblically engaged in beliefs about the Bible and 7% in spiritual disciplines. African Americans and Caucasians tied at 20% in the Bible Knowledge category, with Latinos next with 14%.

African Americans churches are traditionally more active in social issues, as ABS’s survey revealed. It is also encouraging to have seen in this project’s survey that African Americans were more consistent in their overall attitudes towards the Bible and spiritual disciplines. Census Bureau data provide some clarity of the influence of the Bible on African Americans when population data is compared between African Americans and Caucasians. In 2009, the most recent data available, Caucasians were 80% of the population, while African Americans were 12%. This shows that while African Americans represent just 12% of the population when compared with their peers, 8 out of 10 are either Biblically engaged or very close to being so.

Among their peers, there were several significant changes regarding race

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269 Ibid., 45-45.
270 e.g. When asked if the Bible is oppressive to certain groups, including the LGBT community, women, and certain races, African Americans were more likely than whites to agree strongly (24% of African Americans cp with 13% of whites). pp. 45-46.
with the results in this project. There were only 2 respondents who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native. However, both qualified as Biblically engaged with regard to beliefs about the Bible. That is 100%. African Americans came in 2nd as the most Biblically engaged in beliefs about the Bible with 87% (13 of 15). Caucasians were 3rd with 62% (168 of 235). Latino respondents scored 57% (8 of 14) among their peers as Biblically engaged in their beliefs about the Bible.

The results of respondent’s answers regarding spiritual disciplines and Bible knowledge among their peers were similar but mostly lower, to the overall results with this project versus the national survey. The Bible Society asked those surveyed to respond to if they desired to use the Bible more. This project’s question on how often one reads their Bible was used to correlate responses. For the ABS survey, the largest group responding that they desired to use their Bible more were African Americans, at 70%. Hispanics were next at 65%, and Whites came in 3rd at 53%. When asked how often one reads their Bible in this project, 161 responded either daily or several times a week. Responses from both minority groups, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian or Pacific Islander, were 100% among their peers that they are regular readers of the Bible. African Americans were next with 87% among their peers, stating they are regular readers of the Bible. Both Caucasians and Latino’s positive responses to regular reading of the Bible were at 57%.

Income Levels

The largest segment of respondents for this project identified themselves with a household income between $50,000 and $90,000 (see Figure 7). Those who scored highest in their responses on beliefs about the Bible, and identified as Biblically engaged, were also the middle-income bracket of $50,000 and $90,000 (45% or 87 of 192). Those with income below $50,000 were 2nd in their Biblically engaged beliefs about the Bible with 33% (64 of 192).
In comparing with the ABS survey, there was disagreement of which income level is more Biblically engaged. The Bible Society survey showed that those with a household income below $50,000 consistently scored highest as Bible-centered and Bible-engaged. When different categories are compared, there continue to be differences in the two surveys. For instance, in this project’s survey statement: “I believe a better understanding of what the Bible teaches will give me a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment in life” (see Figure #12), household incomes between $50,000 and $90,000 scored highest with 45% (87 of 195), as compared to household incomes below $50,000 who scored 33% (64 of 195). Household incomes over $100,000 were again in the low twenty’s percentile (44 of 195, or 22%). The Bible Society’s similar statement, “The Bible has transformed my life,” showed adults with low-to mid-income levels more likely to strongly agree with that statement.

These differences in results between the two surveys could be the result of several factors. In this project, when age groups for Question #16 (Figure 12) are broken down, most correct responses came from the Baby Boomers (54% or 105 out of 195) and Gen X (24%, or 47 of 195). This compares positively with the ABS survey as their results showed both Gen X and Baby Boomers make up the majority of Bible-centered, Bible-engaged, and Bible-friendly.

Sampling Accuracy

American Bible Society’s report also provided several steps in determining the range of sampling errors to indicate the accuracy of survey results. Sampling accuracy is essential, of course, in drawing any meaningful conclusions. And no one, especially regarding the importance of Biblical literacy in the American Church, wants to make a prediction like the Chicago Daily Tribune headline of 1948 that Thomas Dewey had won the Presidency over Harry Truman.

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273 Ibid., 6.
The Bible Society points out that the range of sampling error indicates the accuracy of the results and is dependent on two factors: 1) the sample size; and 2) the degree to which the result is close to 50% or to the extremes, 0%, and 100%.\textsuperscript{274} Using ABS’s chart, it was determined that responses to this project’s survey questions were within 5.8\% +/-, meaning there is a 95\% chance that the actual percentage of self-identified Christians is in that range. Based, then, on data provided by SurveyMonkey, the website tool used for this project, there is high confidence that the responses to this project represents 2500 self-identified Christians in America.

**National Census Bureau Trends for the Religiously-Affiliated**

In a recent survey the National Census Bureau measured the religious affiliations of Americans who identified as Christian. The graph included (see Figure #47) compared Census Bureau data with that from this project and, as can be seen in the graph, the results are consistent with each other. The project results do show a lower response from Catholics (27\% versus 30\% in 2008 and 33\% in 1990). Those who self-identified as non-Denominational is a much larger group in this project’s respondents (27\% versus less than 2\% in 1990 and less than 5\% in 2008). This result, however, is indicative of the ABS and Barna Group results that show many moving away from traditional churches to more non-traditional groups.

Overall, both the Census Bureau survey between 1990 and 2008, and this project’s survey, demonstrate that approximately 85\% of Americans identify as Christians in some form. The results from this project’s survey, however, appear to confirm what many in America may identify as Christian but do little to follow through with their commitment to Jesus, as commanded in the Bible. David Platt noted that four out of five Americans identify as Christian (similar to this project’s findings), but less than half of them are involved in church on a weekly basis.

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 117.
basis, and the majority of them don’t have a Biblical view of the world around them.\textsuperscript{275} There is good news, however, as seen in the following sections.

Positive Trends from Global Christianity

For the global impact of a Biblically-literate Christendom, Professor Phillip Jenkins, co-director on Historical Studies of Religion in the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University and also a distinguished professor of History and Religious Studies at Penn State University, wrote two highly acclaimed works: \textit{The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity}, and \textit{The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South}.

Professor Jenkins told the Atlantic in an interview about \textit{The Next Christendom} that “as far as we can see from the numbers right now, Christianity is going to continue to be the world’s most numerous religion…until the end of the twenty-first century.”\textsuperscript{276} Jenkins is considered an expert in the field of Global Christianity, and says unequivocally that “for the foreseeable future…the fastest-growing segments of Christianity worldwide will share certain approaches to biblical authority and interpretation.”\textsuperscript{277}

Stanton also quotes John Stonestreet, President of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, who said, “The draw for younger generations to a more structured and ancient expression of Christian worship has to do, at least in part, with a growing desire to connect with something beyond a church brand or strong personality.”\textsuperscript{278} These younger Christians are not looking for theological innovations not connected with historical Christianity, but rather “fidelity to a tradition rooted in the authority and life-giving truth of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 81-2.
John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, senior journalists for the Economist, wrote *God is Back* in 2009 in response to two articles by the Economist: one in early 2000 claiming God had passed away, and one in 2007 declaring God was back from the dead! The authors said of China and Christianity’s explosive growth in that communist country that “the growth of Christianity is…the most startling religious development” in China.\(^{280}\) Most Chinese churches are house churches, offering a formula for growth not too far from the first-century church. These house-churches can be started by anyone, and because the Chinese government has an informal limit of 25 people for unauthorized religious gatherings, this contributes to multiplication of these house-churches, mirroring the early Christians need for secrecy and multiplication. The authors point out this was the same cell model pioneered by John Wesley and South Korean Protestants.\(^{281}\)

The downward spiral of America’s Biblical literacy can be averted. But just as it took years and decades to arrive at its present state, it may take years to correct. But there is always hope. The Church does, after all, serve the Almighty God of the Bible who revealed Himself and His will both through His Word, through Jesus Christ, and the early Church fathers. In fact, for all the concerns raised by this study, and many others of the last half-century, the facts still show a populace who are seekers after the God of the Bible, and who long to know Him and His Word in more profound ways. They are just not seeking Him in traditional ways.\(^ {282}\)

Glenn Stanton noted that new research, which questions the “secularization thesis” that Christianity is dying out and churches are becoming landmarks, says just the opposite of what is repeatedly claimed by the intelligentsia. Religion, in this case, Christianity particularly, is


\(^{281}\) Ibid., 6-7.

experiencing “persistent and exceptional intensity” in America, and that America is an exceptional “counterexample to the secularization thesis.”

Stanton also noted that in the Harvard study, one in three (30%) Americans pray multiple times a day. In Figure # 29 in this project, almost 80% (79.49%) say they pray every day. As pointed out earlier, 96% of self-identified Christians also say they own at least one Bible, and at least 70% (191 of 273) say they read their Bible a minimum of a few times a month.

It is possible that traditional churchgoers and pastors are seeing a decline and assuming that decline is Christianity-wide in America? Stanton says, however, that while mainline churches are “hemorrhaging” members, many are not leaving Christianity but just going to places of worship outside the traditional brick-and-mortar houses of worship. It is “substantive Christianity” that draws people. Churches that provide that type of substance via regular Bible study, a call to real discipleship, and an encouraging daily intimacy with God will not lack for members. Pew Research reports that in the past decade traditional denominations such as Baptists and Methodist saw no change (Baptists had a 33% share) or decline (Methodists went from 12% to 10%), while non-Denominational and Pentecostal groups increased from 10 to 13% between the years of 2007 to 2014.

In *The Myth of the Dying Church*, Stanton says the Church is doing well in the 21st century. He does admit there are concerns that include Biblical illiteracy and theological knowledge. No one can close their eyes and pretend America is as strong a Christian nation as when it was founded. However, Stanton does note that there is a higher percentage of Americans

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283 Ibid.
284 Figure 20 shows that 38% read their Bible every day, and 21% a few times a week.
286 Ibid.
today who attend church than in any time in her history, including the colonial times.\textsuperscript{289}

Stanton’s conclusions lead to additional positive claims. First, Biblical churches are holding firm. Second, church attendance is at an all-time high. Third, more young adults attend biblically faithful churches today than nearly 50 years ago. And fourth, atheism and agnosticism are not growing wildly, despite the claims of liberal thinkers.\textsuperscript{290}

\textbf{Lessons Learned from This Project}

The survey revealed some positive data points that are encouraging for the Evangelical Church. First, self-identified Christians continue to have a robust and Biblically healthy view of God’s Word. The top 3 group of respondents (Evangelical, Non-Denominational, and Pentecostal/Charismatic) scored greater than 73\% among their peers in their beliefs about the Bible. The remaining 3 groups scored 63\% or less and meshes well with Stanton’s claims that traditional churches are losing members as liberal theology has grown, denying many of the traditional doctrines of the Church.\textsuperscript{291}

Almost 95\% of the respondents in this project believe the Bible is divinely inspired and God’s revelation to humankind. This high regard of Scripture has not translated into regular, Biblically literate readers. However, this does not have to be a permanent result. Christians continue to defy the odds when presented with God’s truths, and leading believers, both young and old, back to regular reading of God’s Word is possible.

Overall, a vital takeaway from the survey is the attitude self-identified Christians have towards discipleship. The results are not unexpected, as this writer’s research has shown a

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., xx.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid., xix-xx.
\textsuperscript{291} Stanton shares one story of EastLake Church in Seattle, whose pastor, after seeing phenomenal growth for years, saw its membership and finances plummet in just weeks after the pastor announced a major theological shift – they would become fully supportive of homosexuality. In the pastor’s own word: “I don’t care if the Bible says, ‘Gay people suck.’ I have lots of things I disagree with about the Bible.” He disparaged the Scripture in other ways as well. \textit{Myth}, p. 19.
decline among believers in accountability and desire to walk separate from the World and its negative influence in the Church. Still, for the believer, refusing to accept the commands of Jesus in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 to “make disciples” is a sad commentary on the state of the Evangelical Church today. Less than 40%, (38.10%) said they read their Bible daily. When asked whether small groups (i.e., discipleship) was important for Biblical literacy or spiritual growth, 32% said they agreed strongly, while only 25% agreed strongly that small groups are necessary for spiritual growth. What do these numbers mean? Are they positive or negative responses? While some may be discouraged that a minority of self-identified Christians consider these issues important, they also offer an opportunity for ministry and spiritual growth. Men and women said they own Bibles, and many said they read their Bible at least several times a month. The majority believe the in the evangelically correct doctrines. They are just waiting for someone to lead them into a fulfilling life of Bible literacy.

A Simple Solution: Bible Literacy is a Key to Meaningful Discipleship

The believer is responsible for reading God’s Word and seeking transformation from its pages. The Apostle Paul’s admonition is no less compelling today than when he penned these words:

Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God’s marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship. Stop limiting the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes.²⁹²

There are two principles this writer considers very important on the issue of Discipleship and Bible literacy. First, the goal is meaningful discipleship. Many churches today have small groups that meet in homes or churches. But the question everyone involved must ask is whether

²⁹² Romans 12:1-2, TPT.
life change is happening. Bill Hull said it best, “Discipleship involves saving people from themselves and eternal oblivion, permitting the transforming power of God to change them from the inside out.” That will only happen when the Word of God is given its rightful place at the “head of the table,” as it were. Small groups meeting just for the sake of fellowship are not disciple groups in the Biblical sense. Second, the goal is meaningful *discipleship*. If one is not following Scripture or Christ, can they be considered a disciple?

Jim Putman, of Real-Life Ministries, has a thriving, growing church that is based on meaningful discipleship. He makes several points pertinent to this project and how a church should proceed in reducing Biblical literacy and developing a discipleship program that will do so. The definition of discipleship is found in the invitation Jesus gave to His disciples: “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” Putman sees two imperatives from this passage that define a disciple and a disciple-making church. One, a disciple is one who knows and follows Christ. To be a disciple, one must accept Jesus for who He is and what Scripture declares Him to be—the eternal Son of God and Savior of humankind—then come under His authority. Also, a disciple must be a “fisher of men.” The Great Commission does not say “become a disciple.” It says, “make disciples.” Dr. Earley notes that the Church must have a plan to help “everyone grown and develop to reach their full potential in Christ.” A primary goal in disciple-making must be Biblical literacy, even though it appears the Church is failing. A small group program for the purpose of reading the Bible is both necessary and fulfilling in today’s culture.  

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294 Matt 4:19 NKJV.
297 Jim Putman points out that disciple-making is intentional and is a responsibility of every church. Sadly, many churches are not fulfilling that part of the Great Commission.
God’s Word Changes Your Reality

“What is Truth?” Christians will recognize the question posed by Pilate to Jesus when Pilate asked: “You are a king then?” Jesus said, “You say that I’m a king…I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Earlier in John’s Gospel, Jesus taught his disciples that he was: “…the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Truth is considered relative today for many, meaning one’s truth can change due to circumstances, time, or commitments. But Scripture is clear that ultimate reality is found in God and in His Word. The physical universe does not offer the satisfaction every man, woman, and child seeks after. As the saying goes: “Facts change, but Truth is forever.” As the Christian pastor/leader, ensure God’s Word is given the spot on the believer’s pedestal it deserves.

God’s Word Changes Lives

Believing in the transformative power of the Bible is crucial to meaningful discipleship and spiritual growth. David Platt and Buddy Gray note that for many Christians today the Bible has simply become a self-help book where one goes to find answers to a question or life event. While many are not reading the Bible regularly because of time constraints and busy lives, Gray points out that the real problem is that Christians are living at a level of information, and the Bible is just another source of that information. As David Platt includes, leaders have programmed believers to look at the Bible as a resource manual for how to live life, when the truths of the Bible are meant for transformation and Christlikeness. Christians view the Bible as just another resource. Platt says they believe they can go to the bookstore to find answers in

298 John 18:37-38 NIV.
299 John 14:6 NIV.
301 Ibid.
another book rather than searching Scripture. This is because they believe the other books will communicate to them better than the Bible. George Guthrie says that pastors and teacher train today’s Christian to look at the Bible as a self-help tool with the type of messages taught, such as topical studies that are self-help oriented.  

**God’s Word Changes Society**

George Guthrie said that “it is important that we read the Bible and read it well.” E.D. Hirsch, speaking to the importance of cultural literacy and Biblical literacy, said that, “No one in the English-speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible…All educated speakers…need to understand what is meant when someone describes a contest as being between David and Goliath…who has the ‘wisdom of Solomon’…” Guthrie also notes that a survey in 2005 revealed that 98% of high school English teachers believed that students who are Biblically literate have an edge academically to those who do not.

In Barna’s 2016 survey, *The Bible in America*, there is a valuable lesson for the Church today, taken from the nineteenth century, in the necessity to re-establish the supremacy of the Bible in the 21st-century believers’ life. In Barna’s special report, *The State of the Bible in America in 1816*, Barna shared a response from the ABS to a *New York Times* article on October 28, 1996, which pointed out the decline of Bible use in America. Eugene Habecker, then-President and CEO of ABS wrote a letter to the *Times* in response noting the apparent decline of Bible use was more likely the result of lack of use. Habecker’s concern was that while close to 90% of Americans have a Bible in their homes “few had any idea what was in it or how to engage with its content.”

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302 Ibid., 278  
303 Ibid., 2.  
304 Ibid.  
305 Ibid., 3.  
However, Habecker’s predecessor, Elias Boudinot, the first President of ABS, saw the problem of Bible illiteracy, not a result of use but one of distribution. Pertinent to this project is Boudinot’s opinion that there were:

…a large number of people living in the United States who did not own a copy of the Christian Scriptures and who would benefit from having access to the Bible. He believed that the Bible was a tool for evangelism, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, any reader of the Bible could decipher its meaning and be transformed by its message. The goal was to simply put a copy of the Bible – without interpretive notes or comments – in the hand of as many people as possible and let God do the rest.\(^{307}\)

Therefore, Boudinot’s mission of the ABS was two-fold: distribution, and evangelism.

Missionaries sent through America were not only tasked with evangelistic endeavors but to collect data on the state of Bible ownership. One missionary, Samuel J. Mills, discovering the great need for the Bible in American homes, broken-heartedly said that “‘the whole country,’ from ‘Lake Erie to the Gulf of Mexico,’ is ‘as the valley of the shadow of death’ due to a lack of Bibles.”\(^{308}\)

The beauty of Boudinot’s convictions were the actions of the ABS following this realization by putting a Bible in the hands of every American possible. Over a period of three to four decades from the creation of the ABS, Boudinot’s prayer for putting the Bible in the hands of Americans was answered. American Bible Society “published and distributed millions of Bibles throughout the United States and the world.”\(^{309}\) The valuable lesson to be learned by the 21-century Christian? As a result of merely putting Bibles in the hands of individuals and families, regardless of race, religion, or political persuasion, Boudinot’s efforts contributed to a massive evangelical revival that swept the nation during the nineteenth century, “Essentially

\(^{307}\) Ibid., 39.
\(^{308}\) Ibid.
\(^{309}\) Ibid., 40.
Christianizing the culture and bringing moral reform to the republic,” bringing the Bible and “Christianity to ordinary people in 19th-century America.”

How Best to Disciple for Bible Literacy: Reading the Word

Acronyms are also an easy tool to use in teaching, and offering a mnemonic assists the teacher with disciples internalize the lesson. With that in mind, this writer has developed a mnemonic for the purpose of encouraging Bible reading. R.E.A.D.\textsuperscript{311} is the title for the new small group. This is a process that is easily repeatable and will immerse the believer in the Bible and challenge believers to put God’s Word first place in their lives; thereby developing a life-long habit of Bible reading.

F.B. Meyer made some pertinent points in his studies of 1 Peter regarding how to approach a time of Bible study for those who are taking part in a regular Bible reading class for the first time. One must remember their spiritual growth depends on a regular feeding on God’s Word. Meyer said one must not imagine they can grow by merely attending meetings or doing ministry work. But instead, one will grow when they see that their growth is proportionate to their Bible study. Until then, they are merely children carried about by every wind of doctrine.\textsuperscript{312} One should also note that Bible reading as always something they will also feel like doing, or because it is the right time to do so, or as a matter of duty. But one is to read and study the Word of God “under the light of the Holy Spirit,” and as a saint of old, slowly losing their eyesight, might take their Bible to the window and place each open page in the open light of the sun, look to God’s Word for revelation.\textsuperscript{313}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[310] Ibid.
\item[311] See Appendix A.
\item[313] Ibid.
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Observation is a necessary skill if one is to benefit from their reading the Bible. The regular reading encouraged in this project will improve one’s observation of the Biblical narrative. AT Pierson, a 19th-century preacher once made this comment as he was studying:

When I read this passage for the 100th time, the following idea came to me…As in any organism, no member or part, however minute, can be fully understood aside from its relation to the whole, so, in Scripture, every paragraph and sentence is part of its totality, and must be studied in relation to all the rest. The text will be illumined by the context, or scripture immediately preceding and following. Every occurrence and utterance should be studied in its surroundings. How, why, when a word was spoken or an act done, helps to explain it, is its local coloring. Hidden relationships must be traced like underground roots and subterranean channels.314

As the website author noted, here is a great seasoned student of God’s Word saying, “I have to read it (the Bible) repeatedly, and the more I read it, the more I observe.” That is the genius of God’s Word and why it is unlike any book.315

**R.E.A.D. the Word Devotionally**

The results of the research for this project led to developing a discipleship process for both discipling believers and restoring the priority of reading God’s Word that first-century Christian experienced. Devotional reading of Scripture can be done within the confines of the Psalms and Proverbs. Believers can participate in a 45 day “Read through God’s Wisdom” program by reading five chapters a day, allowing extra days for lengthy chapters such as Psalm 119. The goal is regular reading of Scripture. Devotional books are too numerous to list here, but the impetus is reading Scripture without commentary. As Elias Boudinot believed and practiced, the power of the Holy Spirit is always available to every reader of God’s Word, without theological commentary or someone else’s opinion on a passage. Encourage your readers just to read and allow the Holy Spirit to bring the devotional passage to life.

**R.E.A.D. the Word Experientially**

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315 Ibid.
This project revealed self-identified Christians who are not very familiar with the Gospel narratives and Jesus’ teaching. Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Bible, and the Gospels are eyewitness accounts of His earthly ministry. Just as the survey for this project showed that many lack a basic knowledge of the Biblical narrative, regular reading of the Gospels will shed much-needed light on who Jesus was while on the earth and what He actually said and did to share the love of God with the world. One can read the four Gospels in 30 days by reading three to four chapters a day. The beauty of this plan is one could read through all the Gospels several times each year.

**R.E.A.D. the Word Theologically**

The most challenging of the three categories, reading Scripture theologically, means choosing a topic and reading the Word of God for an understanding of fundamental, evangelical doctrine. The subjects chosen are left entirely up to the discipleship leaders. For this project, six topics were chosen as a springboard. There are a number of study materials available from which to choose topics and Scriptures. For this writer, several favorite choices are the Naves Topical Bible and the Thompson Chain Reference Bible. Naves provides a thorough listing of Scripture related to each topic, while Thompson’s work is unparalleled in its extensive study notes with outlines, book summaries, and listings of every major topic of the Bible, broken down for easy study. Thompson provides a thoroughly researched listing of every passage in Scripture that relates to any subject covered. There are also other resources that provide a similar ministry listed in Appendix C.

**The Discipleship Process and Bible Reading**

Choosing the right leaders decides the success for any endeavor. In this case, men and women are needed who can mentor regular Bible reading that will produce Biblically literate

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316 See Appendix A: *R.E.A.D. the Word Theologically.*
Christians. This will involve a discipline to time and energy to accomplish stated goals. Dr. Dave Earley observed that with any small group, especially Christian-based, there are sets of activities that, when used consistently, can lead to growth and multiplication when applied on a weekly schedule. The R.E.A.D. discipleship process leans heavily on mentors who encourage daily reading of God’s Word. As these mentors identify and launch other Bible literacy mentors, the process continues. This is a crucial part of the program as growth and multiplication are the ultimate goals; goals that help to fulfill the Great Commission.

Dr. Earley offers time-tested habits every disciple-mentor should emulate. They include:
1) Dream of leading a healthy, growing group; 2) Pray for the group members daily; 3) Invite new people weekly; 4) Contact group members regularly; 5) Prepare for the meeting; 6) Mentor an Apprentice Leader (disciple-mentors r for this program); 7) Fellowship regularly; and 8) Be committed to personal growth.

Jim Putman offers some sage advice on the necessity of relationships in discipling others and proving the concept of a disciple-mentor will work when implemented. The Christian leader/pastor must be committed to the kind of Godly love found in 1 Corinthians 13 when Paul said the greatest of all God’s gifts is love. Without God’s kind of love, the relationship required between a disciple-maker and a disciple will not grow and could possibly end in ruin. Putman points out that as a human being learns to be human in the confines of a family, so too a believer learns to be spiritually mature in a spiritual family. Putman’s takeaway is something lost in this post-Christian, socially individualized society. Relationships matter if the Church is to accomplish her calling of taking the Gospel to the world. Jesus discipled just twelve men and left

317 Dave Earley, 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders, (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 11.
318 Ibid., 9-10, Reading Dr. Earley’s book is strongly recommended to lay a solid foundation for leaders.
320 Ibid., 89.
the fate of God’s eternal plan in their hands, with the power of the Holy Spirit as their Counselor and Guide. It is a plan that works when done God’s way.

The original thesis for the project projected there would be poor Biblical literacy in a survey designed to questions those values. In the end, those assumptions proved to be correct. While only 4% of self-identified Christians claimed they did not own a Bible, and an average 86% among the top three respondent groups (Evangelical, Non-Denominational, and Pentecostal/Charismatic) did believe in the inspiration and purpose-fulfilling of God’s Word, all groups scored poorly, or showed a lack of concern, in spiritual disciplines that included participation in small groups and memorization of Scripture. The 3rd part of the survey, testing a basic understanding of traditional Biblical narratives and teachings, proved to reflect poorly on many respondents.

There are some positive takeaways from this research. Surveys by Barna Group and the ABS reveal a Christianity that is hungry for spiritual things, and Christians are looking. Biblically traditional churches are growing while liberally theological churches are losing members. This reflects on the attitude that people long for truth. The Church that offers a vibrant Bible reading program that encourages individuals and group reading classes can make real, dramatic changes in the lives of believers.

David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock wrote that there are promising developments even, (and especially) for those who desire to see real change. They concluded there are five ways to re-engage believers. Their research focused on “exiles” as they call them. But these are not exiles in the sense that they are former church-goers who have abandoned the church. These exiles are Christians who live in a “Digital Babylon,” an America that no longer recognizes or lives Christian values. Kinnaman and Matlock say the Church must practice “resilient discipleship,” which is the kind of discipleship that leads to real hope. And the first “practice” is to lead
believers into a more intimate experience with Jesus. This entails helping the believer find their soul’s rest – their “deepest identity” – in Jesus. It involves “clearing religious clutter” as Kinnaman states it, to find closeness and joy in Christ not found in the many superficial versions of Jesus.

The 2nd practice is to develop the muscles of cultural discernment. That is, how does one think about and perceive the Christian’s role in this post-Christian society. This is a never-ending challenge as the Church comes to realize the daily challenges believers find themselves in and attacking that challenge head-on as the more profound questions of how one must live are addressed.

The Church also must forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships (as in the meaningful kind of discipleship this writer noted earlier). As Kinnaman noted and was mentioned earlier in this paper, relationships are crucial to Biblical discipleship. The 21st-century world emphasizes individualism and self-effort, both worthy pursuits. But within the Church, these attitudes lead to stagnation, not growth. The Church is a family and a community that brings people together. Kinnaman found confirmation that the age-old cry “Am I really known and loved by anyone?” continues to be asked by those seeking fulfillment. The Church offers the answer and solution through its community.

The Church must also train for vocational discipleship. Kinnaman sees this as “crafting integrated lives of purpose, especially in the arena of work.”

Rather than separating religious life from secular life, the Church should seek out ways to disciple believers on how to do both well. How should one conduct themselves in this “Digital Babylon” society in a way that brings

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them both eternal and personal fulfillment? Vocational discipleship offers the opportunity for the Church to lead believers into a true lifestyle Christianity, not just a Sunday morning version.

Finally, believers must be taught, and led, to curb the entitlement and self-centered tendencies of the 21st century by engaging in countercultural mission.\footnote{Ibid., 208-09.} For Kinnaman, this means purposefully pursuing a “faithful and fruitful presence in our communities by living differently from cultural norms.”\footnote{Ibid., 209.} If anything, the Church suffers from years of a poor witness in the West. Public ministries have faltered and failed miserably and quite publicly. Gen Z and Millennials have grown up with little in the public arena, which might attract them to Christ. Christians, overcoming the cultural pressures towards self-centeredness, must “counter” that culture and pursue a life worthy of Christ that attracts those without Christ.

Kinnaman concluded that among the Gen Z and Millennials the primary reason young people drop out of church or fall away from the faith is insufficient discipleship, and the way forward is for the church to reconsider how disciples are made.\footnote{David Kinnaman, You Lost Me. Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 201.} And though Glenn Stanton, Pew Research, and even the American Bible Society’s surveys reveal a believer’s base that is not disappearing, but only leaving the traditional church for a more non-traditional worship experience, this project’s survey revealed issues of a lack of commitment to discipleship within the Church by both pastors and laypeople.

What is Next? The Church Will R.E.A.D., The Pastor Expounds!

Biblical literacy is a foundational truth for the Christian faith. How one defines Biblical literacy may be up to debate. This project has shown, however, that beliefs about the Bible do not automatically translate into Biblical action. Spiritual disciplines scored the lowest of the three
categories examined. However, the Apostle John said that the “anointing which you have received from Him abides in you (the Holy Spirit), and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.” So John helped establish one of the truths Jesus taught of the purpose of the Holy Spirit’s coming, a teacher like Jesus. And in re-establishing a Bible reading lifestyle the pastor and church leader whose ministry may have stalled, or their members are losing interest in the things of God, can once again bring life to their church by the power of the Holy Spirit as He fulfills His role as the greatest teacher of God’s Word.

The Church must increase its emphasis on Biblical literacy and using this suggested discipleship process is a Biblical means to do so. There are almost unlimited possibilities in the 21st century to make Biblical literacy an impactful ministry in the local church. Behind every word, in this project, one will find a deep, abiding love for God’s Word. Every concept, chapter, and outline was conceived with a deep sense of awe that the God and Creator of this universe chose to communicate His love for his creation through the words found in a book. Though ridiculed, maligned, lied about, and burned the Bible continues to maintain its supremacy above all the written words throughout history. It was no small thing when the Apostle Paul said the Bible is God-breathed and given to men and women so that “the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

An exciting discovery in researching this project was that the early Church, though mostly illiterate, was not destitute of God’s Word. As noted in Chapter 3, Augustine wrote to Jerome, who gave the world the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, to address a situation where a misunderstanding between a pastor and his church members arose as he read the book of

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325 1 John 2:27 (NKJV).
326 John 14:25-26 (NASB).
327 2Tim 3:16 (NKJV).
Jonah from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, rather than an older Latin version. The fact that his entire church was Biblically literate enough to know when *one word* was changed revealed an experience and knowledge of the Bible not real for most today.

And Elias Boudinot’s (founder of the American Bible Society) contributions cannot be left out in the discussion of restoring Biblical literacy to America. Boudinot’s conviction was that in putting the Bible into the hands of every individual and guiding them just to read the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to be the Guide and Counselor, He is here for, the power of the Word of God would change lives and society. If self-identified Christians in America have easy access to God’s Word, then what can be done to restore regular Bible reading to the Church? The Church needs to take that mantle up once again, and not just declare the veracity of God’s Word, but lead the way in restoring, or stoking, the spiritual hunger to read the Bible. It is an accomplishable goal because God the Father would not ask of His children something they could not do.

The solution is the regular emphasis to read God’s Word together as a church and allow the pastor and local leaders to expound on specific messages from the Word during that week’s readings. This accomplishes several important tasks. It will re-engage the church member by bringing them into the message being taught through reading God’s Word during the week and being better prepared to be taught. This will also ensure the pastor and local leaders are working towards a common goal with the congregants. Everyone will have prepared their hearts to hear what God is speaking that week or season. This writer suggests naming these new small groups “R.E.A.D. Discipleship” groups created for the sole purpose of encouraging, and challenging, believers to read their Bible regularly. The local church pastor or leader can take whatever liberties they choose, but the emphasis must be on reading the Bible regularly. Set weekly and monthly goals based on the suggested Bible reading programs in Appendix A. Reactions may
take a whole range of emotions, but true believers who love the Lord will more than likely be thrilled with a process that can kickstart their Bible reading. Does this open the door to self-righteous competition? Any project which encourages the completion of a lofty goal could do so. The pastor and church leaders’ role is to emphasize the many truths discovered in this projects’ research, praying and believing God’s Word will make the transformative difference in lives of believers that could lead to true revival.

This project has one simple goal; to get believers to re-engage with God’s Word and begin to read it on a regular basis. How one does that is open to interpretation. But whether one should do it is not open for discussion. This project has established that the Scriptures are a crucial part of the believer’s life. Regular reading of God’s Word opens the door for the Holy Spirit to do His work of transformation. The next step is to follow this discipleship process called R.E.A.D. Discipleship Groups.

R.E.A.D. is an acronym for four easy steps to follow as one reads the Bible. Rather than overwhelm a reader with seminary-level teaching, this writer simply wants to encourage the Bible reader to be aware of the “why” for reading God’s Word. Remember, the goal is transformation. Each step guides the reader to ask a question of the text in order to open oneself to the Holy Spirit as the Great Teacher or to follow up in their next discipleship group meeting with their disciple-mentor. It offers an outline for the pastor and church leader to introduce the importance of regular Bible reading, and a mnemonic for the believer as they travel the road to regularly reading God’s Word. The questions posed under each category are a springboard for readers to use to deepen their reading experience and heighten their awareness of the truths found in the Bible. Use these outlines in whatever way seems appropriate,

remembering that Jesus utilized memory aids, as did all teachers in ancient times. This will hopefully plant a seed for the local church and believer who desires to know God more intimately and desires to see the spiritual, emotional, and physical transformation offered by God through His Word.

**Discipleship Process for Biblical Literacy: R.E.A.D.**

This discipleship process asks the reader to ask a series of questions of the text as they are reading. With that in mind, it is recommended that the reader take each process, one at a time, as a passage is read. For instance, if one is reading the Bible experientially, the Gospels will be read every 30 days or so. Since the goal is to read these books multiple times, have questions from one process ready to ask of the text as you read. Then, the next month have a different set of questions, from one of the other processes ready. In this way, the reader can experience both the joy of reading God’s Word multiple times and the revelation of the Holy Spirit as the teacher.

**Francis Chan And We Are Church**

Francis Chan has proven that he has a heart after God and a desire to see the Church move in a powerful, biblical way. Several impactful choices deal directly with how Christians interact with God’s Word and are pertinent to the conclusions for this project. Chan noted over the years after he left Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, CA after 17 years of ministry, that he believed the American Church had lost its way and no longer following the biblical mandate as found in the New Testament. After years of soul-searching and prayer Chan created the “We Are Church” ministry. Within Chan’s We Are Church they hold to five values and six practices that define who they are and what they do. The six values are 1) Devoted Worshipers, 2) Loving

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330 See page 12 for a fuller explanation of R.E.A.D.
331 See Appendix A: *R.E.A.D. the Word Experientially.*
Families, 3) Equipped Disciple-Makers, 4) Spirit-Filled Missionaries, and 5) Suffering Sojourners.\textsuperscript{332}

The six practices for We Are Church are: 1) Devotion to Scripture, 2) We Meet in Homes, 3) Everyone Discipled and Discipling, 4) Everyone Exercises Their Gifts, 5) Regular Multiplication of Churches, and 6) Simple Gatherings.\textsuperscript{333} Practice One, Devotion to Scripture, is designed to lead people to Jesus and the Gospel message through daily interaction with God’s Word. The shepherds/pastors who lead the weekly larger group (10-20 people) get-togethers, which meet in homes, will minister God’s Word from a passage that was read by the believers the previous week. In this way Chan believes the hearers will not be burdened down by lengthy messages, and the speakers will be more attuned to what God has to say because God has already spoken to the church during the week from His Word.

The value of We Are Church cannot be understated. Believers are encouraged to read God’s Word regularly, knowing that God will then speak to the church as a group from His Word once again, thus reinforcing the truths found and lives will thus be transformed. As Chan also puts it, as the home church grows to 30, 40, 50 or more then it will be a prime time to divide and launch another home church and start the process again. Also, to encourage the ongoing daily reading of the Bible, Chan developed a daily reading program, found on their website, for everyone to follow. The entire Bible will be read each year.\textsuperscript{334} We Are Church emphasizes devotion to God through His Word, and discipling others towards the same goals.

\textbf{Neil Cole and Life Transformation Groups}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{332} More in depth explanations can be found at Francis Chan’s We Are Church website: http://www.wearechurch.com/values-1.
\item \textsuperscript{333} http://www.wearechurch.com/structure-1.
\item \textsuperscript{334} The reading program for We Are Church is found at: http://www.wearechurch.com/bible-reading-2018.
\end{itemize}
Cole’s Life Transformation Groups (LTG) is a tool designed as an effective way to develop spiritual growth by emphasizing three essential elements within the structure of a small group. The three disciplines are confession of sin, a steady diet of Scripture, and prayer for others who need Christ.\(^{335}\) Cole provides an excellent study on the need for regular reading of God’s Word, along with numerous examples lives changed by this spiritual discipline. He makes it clear that the power behind the success of LTGs is the “unleashing of God’s word into the lives of people,” noting that it is the Word of God that is the “seed of new life.”\(^{336}\) He calls this discipline “Scripture is Planted.”\(^{337}\)

The distinguishing difference between Chan’s Bible reading program and Neil Cole’s Life Transformation Groups plan lies in the order and amount of reading. While Chan’s program takes the reader through the entire Bible once a year by reading roughly two to three chapters a day, Cole’s plan is to read 25 to 30 chapters a week (a minimum of five chapters a day), from the same book each week and reading through it as often as possible that week. Cole’s goal is to have believers reading large volumes of Scripture repetitively and in context. He suggests that a LTG experiment until they find an amount of reading that keeps the group in a particular book for about four weeks before moving on. That averages out to 25-30 chapters a week.\(^{338}\) Cole also strongly suggests that the group does not move on to another book until everyone has read the chosen book. If someone does not complete the reading for that week, the group simple continues in the same book the following week. This would more likely be the case for the larger books, but Cole believes there is value when everyone understands the need to complete the requested readings on time.

\(^{336}\) Ibid., 56.
\(^{337}\) Ibid.
\(^{338}\) Ibid.
Cole’s groups read in the following manner. If a shorter book is chosen, such as Ephesians, Jonah or another epistle or minor prophet, the book can be read five to seven times during that week. A book of more moderate size, such as 1 Corinthians, or Romans, can be read two times in a week. Longer books such as Proverbs, Revelation, or Acts can be read once in a week. Much longer books such as the major prophets, Genesis, Psalms can be broken up. With Genesis, Cole recommends breaking it up into three sections. One week read chapters 1-12 several times. The following week read chapters 13-35 multiple times; followed by chapters 36-50 the next week.339

Along with Chan, an important goal in Cole’s system is impactful spiritual growth. One of the strengths of Cole’s process is found in its small group structure of two to three. It is within this small group that the group is held accountable to three processes, or steps. Cole provides accountability questions to be asked to everyone in the group in the first step of confession of sin, and everyone is expected to answer honestly. Cole believes the group must be a safe place where individuals feel free to participate and be vulnerable. This is a primary reason he says each group must be one gender only. The 2nd step, one which meets the expectations found in this writer’s conclusions, is Cole’s answer found in the regular reading of the Bible. The emphasis is not found in how many books are read, nor how quickly. The value of reading God’s Word daily is the emphasis. Believers learn to develop the daily habit of reading and expecting the Holy Spirit to be their guide.

Cole’s program follows a similar process designed and made famous by John Wesley’s Band groups. Wesley’s Bands were the smallest of his three groups of Society, Class, and Bands, and intended for strong, personal growth. However, while Wesley’s Bands were intended for more mature believers, Cole is emphatic that the Life Transformation Groups are for all level of

339 Ibid.
Christian maturity. Cole admits that the “miracle we need the most right now is one that the Lord has freely given us already. It is the power of a changed life.”\textsuperscript{340} And it is in seeking that miracle that Cole believes even the youngest of believers can participate through his LTGs. Found in the New Testament are “many examples of people who have only just met Jesus, have little knowledge of His person or work and yet are already able to effectively stand up to others with a bold witness. They do so all on the irrefutable persuasion of a changed life.”\textsuperscript{341}

Finally, Cole’s organic church movement shows that the LTG process is biblical with the following summation of following Christ’s pattern:

Jesus sent the disciples out in teams of two (Matt. 10:1-2; Luke 10:11). He invested most in an inner circle made up of Peter, James, John, and sometimes Andrews, and Himself, which makes a team of five. He lived every day with a spiritual family of the twelve disciples. He personally trained and deployed the seventy. When He ascended into heaven, he left behind 120 disciples. He appeared in person at one time to more than five hundred followers after His resurrection…Leaders and leaders of leaders can and should follow Christ’s example.\textsuperscript{342}

While it has become a cliché in many circles, the reality is that the Bible is not a foundational truth for many believers as seen from this project’s survey, Cole’s LTG process is minimal, does not require a college-level degree to implement, and is read-made for any church who seeks real spiritual growth among their congregants.

This writer was exposed to a three-man accountability group in the mid-eighties that was very similar to Cole’s system that proved life-changing for many of the reasons Cole gives to explain his success with the program. A lifetime enjoyment of God’s Word was one result, as well as a recognition of the power of accountability and openness within the family of God.

\textbf{The Book of Common Prayer}

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\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., 11.
Completed in 1549 by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, the Common Book of Prayer was referred to by one historian as: “one of a handful of texts to have decided the future of world language.” In the guidance for service of the church readers are told that “they [the ancient Fathers] so ordered the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year; intending thereby, that the Clergy, and especially such as were Ministers in the congregation, should…be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine…” This chapter opening continues by reminding readers that God’s Word has been left unread, for the most part, except for some passages used during certain seasons of the year such as Advent. This book of prayer was created, therefore, for the purpose of providing a regular reading program for both morning and evening. This is a reading program where the entire community can participate, and rules, though minimal, established for the order of services.

Some raised in evangelical circles might object to the strictness of the service and readings from God’s Word. However, there are many who might respond well to such order and be more easily encouraged to participate in regularly reading their Bible. The Common Book of Prayer provides several advantages to consider. The Mattins (morning) and Evensong (evening) readings are not difficult or lengthy. One chapter or less is the required reading; and often is matched with the different seasons of the year celebrated by the Anglican Church. The schedule also provides messages that correlate with the readings, similar to what Francis Chan’s program offers. One cannot miss the historical significance of the Common Book of Prayer as well. Here is a work of regular reading from God’s Word that has been in the Church since the 16th century.

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345 Ibid., 58.
The Role of the Holy Spirit

Finally, it should go without saying that any endeavor in reading God’s Word without seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Author, is both futile and an affront to everything the Evangelical Church believes, and the Word of God teaches. Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit’s coming was to “guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak.”\(^{346}\) The Holy Spirit is our Comforter, our Guide, and revealer of Truth. To the unbeliever the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of Jesus Christ’ coming, and the Gospel. To the believer the Holy Spirit continues to provide revelation, encouragement, strength, and life. The Apostle Paul said, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”\(^{347}\) Believers must always be encouraged to pray before reading God’s Word, asking the Divine Illuminator to open God’s Word and reveal His truths; whether one is reading one chapter or ten.

The thesis for this project was that Biblical illiteracy contributes to the degradation of the American church and the moral foundations in America. However, equipping believers to become more Christlike by a return to Biblical literacy can not only stay the hand of decay but bring about a true transformative revival in America and around the world. This project has shown that believers do indeed hold the Bible in high esteem while not regularly reading it. And as every believer is called to be a disciple and to make disciples, using a coordinated plan between Sunday morning and small groups as a means of encouraging Bible reading can contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission. Pastors and church leaders must encourage themselves to step up and once again become strong advocates for Bible reading. The local church can create R.E.A.D. Discipleship groups and, with the community power available with

\(^{346}\) John 16:13, NKJV.
\(^{347}\) Rom 8:14, NJKV.
groups services, open the door for the Holy Spirit to change believers by the regular reading of
God’s Word. Use the resources available from Neil Cole and Francis Chan. Be open to new
ideas and concepts that may challenge older beliefs, but open doors for another great move of
God.
Appendix A

Bible Reading Plans

Ten Chapters A Day

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Five Chapters A Day

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<td>Malachi</td>
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348 Adapted from Bible Study Tools, https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/.
R.E.A.D. the Word Devotionally – Average 5 chapters a day, 35 chapters weekly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>Psalms 1-30</th>
<th>Proverbs 1-5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Psalms 31-60</td>
<td>Proverbs 6-10</td>
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<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Psalms 61-90</td>
<td>Proverbs 11-15</td>
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<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Psalms 91-118</td>
<td>Proverbs 16-20</td>
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<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Psalm 119</td>
<td>Proverbs 21-25</td>
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<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Psalms 120-150</td>
<td>Proverbs 26-31</td>
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R.E.A.D. the Word Experientially - Average 3-4 chapters daily – 22-23 chapters weekly

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<tr>
<th>Week One</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Matthew 24 – Luke 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Luke 3-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>John 1-21</td>
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R.E.A.D. the Word Theologically\(^{349}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>God’s Attributes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
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<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Salvation</td>
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<td>Week Five</td>
<td>The Passion and Resurrection</td>
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<td>Week Six</td>
<td>The Church</td>
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<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Family</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^{349}\) Topical Bibles like Naves breaks down these categories for easy Scripture study.
Appendix B

Bible Reading Resources


- Bible Study Tools Reading Plans: https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/


- Francis Chan We Are Church: http://www.wearechurch.com/

- Francis Chan Wae Church Bible Reading Program for 2019: https://www.dropbox.com/s/ixqo9ztn057va22/WACReadingPlan2019.pdf?dl=0 350


- The Bible Project: https://thebibleproject.com/. This is an excellent and well-produced website that offers short animated videos explaining God’s plans and purposes found in all the books of the Bible covering the Old and New Testaments, themes, and word studies.

- Neil Cole Life Transformation Groups: https://www.cmaresources.org/

- Pertinent studies from the Barna Group: https://www.barna.com/


  - The Bible in America: 6-Year Trends: https://www.barna.com/research/the-bible-in-america-6-year-trends/

  - 51% of Churchgoers Don’t Know of the Great Commission: https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/

350 Francis Chan’s website also utilizes the Bible Project’s videos as the reader goes through the annual reading plan to provide insightful lessons for background and history.
What Do Americans Believe About Jesus? 5 Popular Beliefs:

- Sunday School Lessons: https://teachsundayschool.com/
- Bible Printables that include character studies, fill-in-the-verse, and book studies:
  https://teachsundayschool.com/i/bibleprintables/
  - For children: http://www.dmbibleplayer.com/tips-for-an-effective audio-bible-listening-program/
- The Story by Max Lucado and Randy Frazee
  - The Story is a beautiful adaptation of the Bible divided into thirty-one chapters and presents God’s Word in a continuous narrative of God’s relationship to man and the story of redemption.
  - Its beauty is found in how the story of the Bible is presented, offering the opportunity for reading the entire Bible, minus chapter and verse, and coming away with a connection with the Bible not often found when reading the more traditional versions.
  - In addition, a thirty-one-day study guide is available designed to engage readers through personal reflection and group participation in the life-changing interaction with the Upper Story of God’s perspective and the Lower Story of humankind’s perspective. As Pastor Kimberly Ashby and her parishioners noted, this was a transformational event for their church.\(^{351}\)
- The Pocket Testament League

\(^{351}\) Kimberly Secrist Ashby, “Learning the Bible Together.”
The PTL, established in 1893, offers a unique opportunity for Christians to share God’s Word; in this case, the Gospel of John, to unbelievers and believers alike. Its purpose is to motivate Christians to develop a lifestyle of biblical discipline and personal evangelism.

For a small cost, those who participate purchase thirty Gospel of John booklets at a time with the intention of placing one booklet in a pocket or purse to give away each day of the month (thus the name of the ministry). Members (free to join) are provided an ID # that is placed in the back of the booklet for tracking purposes if the reader chooses to accept Christ and calls the PTL number for follow-up. It is a simple, effective way to encourage evangelism for the Christian and reading the Gospel of John. Testimonies
Bibliography


Hammett, Edward. *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age and Making the Church Work.*


Jones, Scott J. *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture.* Nashville: Kingswood-Abingdon, 1995


Larson, Timothy T. “Literacy and Biblical Knowledge: The Victorian Age and Our Own.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* 52, no. 3 (Sep 2009), 519-535.


Little, Jennifer A. "God, Authority, and Theological Literacy in Preaching." *Encounter* 75, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 1-23.


IRB Approval

From: IRB, IRB  
Sent: Thursday, September 20, 2018 3:26 PM  
To: Austin, Joseph  
Cc: Burrell, Dan L (School of Divinity Instruction); IRB, IRB  
Subject: IRB Exemption 3380.092018: The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church

Dear Joseph G Austin,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.
If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School