

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Examining Biblical Certainty of Salvation Among the Elderly in
Interdenominational Resident Communities**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Mark V. Triller

Lynchburg, Virginia

June 2020

Copyright © 2020 Mark V. Triller
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Mentor: Dr. Daphne Washington
Adjunct Professor, School of Divinity and Behavioral Sciences

Reader: Dr. Margaret Gopaul
Adjunct Professor, School of Behavioral Sciences and Psychology

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Mark V. Triller

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020

Mentor: Dr. Daphne Washington

A fundamental error in urgency is made in perceiving that elderly persons have a surer and more substantive faith. One thing can be certain: those aged 80 and older have already eclipsed the life expectancy for United States residents and their time on this earth is nearing completion. The goal of this project was to provide an informed assessment of the deficit of biblical understanding among a group of elderly residents living in an interdenominational residence facility. This project reported on the spiritual gaps in biblical understanding addressed with the teaching of focused biblical truth in the areas of the certainty of the Bible, trust in God, and assurance of heaven. The process included a questionnaire that was distributed to members of the resident community and gauged the perception of the truth of the Bible, their trust in God, and assurance of salvation. The intervention presented included three group teaching sessions over dinner for those who had demonstrated the greatest total deficit in these areas during an initial meeting. A second identical questionnaire, individual follow-up, and a self-assessment were provided for each participant. The *t*-test revealed success in reducing the gap for understanding the Bible and for assurance of salvation with the use of focused instruction. Those interested in the faith practice of the elderly may wish to design worship and follow-up activities in their communities that relate to this work.

Acknowledgments

This work is dedicated to my Lord Jesus. As Psalm 73:26 reminds me, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” May God receive the glory and attention as this work was inspired, spurred, and completed through the goodness of God. I also acknowledge my mentor, Dr. Daphne Washington, whose constant upbeat encouragement sparked its completion. I thank Dr. Margaret Gopaul and her expert advice as reader. To my wife, Annika, and my children, I thank them for their prayers and constant support through the years of completing this project. Finally, this is dedicated on behalf of all of the elderly residents living in communities together: May you seek His way, truth, and life.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Ministry Context	2
Problem Presented	12
Purpose Statement	13
Basic Assumptions	14
Definitions	16
Limitations	18
Delimitations	20
Organization of the Study	21
Thesis Statement	22
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	23
Literature Review	25
Scriptures Addressing the Aged and Urgency of Faith	25
<i>Age and Elderly</i>	25
<i>Certainty of the Bible</i>	28
<i>Certainty of God</i>	29
<i>Assurance of Salvation</i>	30
The Literature	32
<i>Biblical Illiteracy</i>	33
<i>The Effects of Aging</i>	35
<i>Fear and Anxiety</i>	37
<i>Denominational Differences</i>	38
<i>Distinguishing between Biblical and Religious Issues for the Elderly</i>	40
<i>Teaching the Elderly the Bible</i>	41
Gaps in the Literature	42
Theological Foundations	42
Theoretical Foundations	49
Chapter 3: Methodology	57
Intervention Design	58
Purpose and Objective	58
Decision to Exclude Certain Residents	60
The Tasks to Be Done and Related Details	61
Ethical Issues Related to Informed Consent and Confidentiality	81
The Types of Data Collected	83
Protocols for Tools	83
The Analysis/Evaluation Procedures and Methods	85
The Recruitment Process for Seniors in the Study	86
Implementation of the Intervention	87
Processes	88
Issues	89

Questions.....	89
Chapter 4: Results.....	91
The Results of the Intervention Plan: Statistical Mean.....	94
Individual Gap Area Scores	98
The <i>t</i> -Test for Two Dependent Means	99
The Catholic Residents	101
Self-Assessment of Areas	102
Second Measure: Questions Asked.....	103
Follow-up Sessions	109
Comparison of Results to Expectations	110
Unexpected Results	112
Implementation and Design	112
The Analysis Tool.....	113
The Intervention Plan: The Teaching	114
Possible Next Steps for Research	114
Conclusion	115
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	117
Overview	119
The Chapters of This Project.....	120
About the Research.....	125
Published Work in the Field and This Project	125
Practices and Processes Learned	128
Effectiveness of the Project	129
Limitations.....	130
Recommendations for Future Research	131
Implementation	133
Thesis Restatement	135
Conclusion	135
Bibliography	138
Appendix A: Pre-Questionnaire.....	146
Appendix B: Post-Questionnaire	147
Appendix C: Site Approvals	148
Appendix D: Consent Form	150
Appendix E: Recruitment Documents	152
Appendix F: Invitations and Reminders	154
Appendix G: “Food for Thought” Session Notes	159
Appendix H: Follow-Up Session Materials	162
Appendix I: Supplemental Sermon Outlines	166
Appendix J: IRB Approval Letter	169

Tables

4.1	Participant Number Assignment, Attendance, and Initial Gap	95
4.2	Results of Pre- and Post-Intervention	96
4.3	Individual Gap Scores for Three Areas Pre-Intervention	98
4.4	Participant Self-Assessment of Increased Knowledge in Studied Areas	103
4.5	Demographic Breakdown of Questions Asked	104

Illustrations

4.1	Individual Spiritual Gap Totals	97
4.2	The t -Test Results for Spiritual Gaps.....	100
4.3	Number of Questions Asked after Each Session	105

Chapter 1

Introduction

Three shrill beeps and the bright red scooter came to a halt. In this mobility scooter sat Grace, a woman of ninety-one years who recently moved into a senior residence in a suburban midwestern town where 123 others have now made their new home.¹ Normally she is a woman with kind eyes and a soft smile, but on this day, Grace was weeping and slumped over her handlebars as her tears trickled onto her sneakers resting on the foot pads. She had just heard a message from the campus pastor from Romans 10:9–10 and exclaimed, “I grew up in the Lutheran Church and I know this, at least I thought I did but now, at this time in my life, I’m not really too sure I ever understood it.” Then, as if her next realization was like finding the first crack in the foundation of a beloved ninety-one-year old home she said, “I just don’t know why God would want me.” She is not alone. Even a churchgoer of ninety-one years can miss the truth that the Bible offers her and doubt the God that created and loves her. This biblical knowledge gap is not only for the young, but the elderly face it with desperation; as one resident put it, “We are closer to whatever is next because we’re old.”

The thought of “whatever” illustrates part of the problem. Elderly residents near the end of their lives face distress and anxiety as they consider what is next after death. They are of a generation that followed their parents to church and took their children to church as well. However,

¹ The exact name of the residence and the location are not offered in order to protect the identity of the residents.

many residents of the facility being studied come from mainline denominations such as Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist, and have walked, ridden the bus or train, and driven to church for decades but also doubt their fate after death. They have understood the Bible from fifteen-minute homilies but have not drunk often from its deep well of truth.

Inadequate biblical training and a lack of spiritual leadership to encourage the elderly in their younger years to meditate on and contemplate the truth of biblical matters has led a significant number of them to a perilous place from which there is little relief. For others, the practice of receiving the faith tradition of their parents was never in question. For this reason, if they did not understand their faith or if they were to have a question about the validity of a concept in faith, many would not have pursued the answer because speaking of religion was a much more private issue for them. There is a great need to bridge the gap for this precious population by constructing a plan for them to attain what they lack in biblical understanding and reproduce the excitement for learning and the certainty of assurance of salvation among their peers.

Ministry Context

The elderly residents living at the site of this study range in age from 65 to 105 years old.² They come from three generations that include the GI or Greatest Generation (born 1901–1926), the Silent Generation (1927–1945) and the Baby Boomers (1946–1964). They have come to a beautiful facility either willingly or via the prodding of their children, if necessary. They experienced many changes in the few months before their arrival. Some of these changes include loss of their ability to drive, the sale of their longtime home or condominium, the death of a spouse, saying goodbye to good friends from their neighborhood, leaving their church, and complications due to aging.

² Resident Census, April, 2019.

The method of how each person arrived at the elderly residence may have some impact as to how receptive they might be to learning the Bible and developing and strengthening their faith in God. Most elderly want to remain in their homes for as long as they can because of their comfort and familiarity with that environment.³ For instance, if an elderly resident was coaxed into coming and left their home unwillingly or upon the advice of an adult child, he or she may be resistant to the many activities of the facility including worship services and Bible study. This group of elderly residents reflects the general population in terms of gender. The majority of residents are widowed women, but there are also widowed men and married couples living at the facility. Infrequently there will be cases of companions living together such as mothers and daughters. Many come to the facility to have a better quality of life and not live in isolation as they might if they are widowed. The very old population has been described as “at risk” because of sensory, mobility, and cognitive declines, which studies show can lead to social isolation and a loss of independence.⁴

Even though prospective residents understand the mission of the facility, which is Christ-centered and rooted in the gospel, not all enter as Christians and some have even been committed atheists. The organization of which the studied facility is a member operates forty-nine such facilities within four states. The organization shares a biblical framework with its current and prospective residents that addresses the mission and provides the framework for ministry at the facility. This framework is built upon the following passages of scripture⁵:

but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved

³ Boštjan Kerbler, Richard Sendi, and Maša Filipovič Hrast, “The Relationship of the Elderly toward Their Home and Living Environment,” *Urbani Izziv* 28, no. 2 (2017): 96–109, <https://doi.org/10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2017-28-02-002>.

⁴ Susanne Iwarsson et al., “Importance of the Home Environment for Healthy Aging: Conceptual and Methodological Background of the European ENABLE–AGE Project,” *The Gerontologist* 47, no. 1 (February 2007): 78–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/47.1.78>.

⁵ Presbyterian Homes, Spiritual Care and Programs, “Biblical Framework,” *Ministry Guide*, 2018.

standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (John 19:25–27)⁶

You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:32)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (1 Peter 4:10)

Moses' father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. (Exodus 18:17–21)

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1–7)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001).

Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:1–8)

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked. (1 Chronicles 4:9–10)

This denominational melting pot and believer/nonbeliever cohabitation provides both encouragement and challenge for the administration seeking to meet the needs of the spiritually diverse residents. Studies have determined that through religious activities such as Bible study, elderly residents can receive comfort, emotional healing, and the ability to grow intellectually.⁷ The site administrator and the campus pastor assume much of the responsibility for helping the newly formed community unite and thrive. Initial interviews with residents revealed that men believe that their faith is more personal and private and that they may not want to attend some of the religious activities for that reason. Traditionally, ecumenical worship services, Bible study, and individual and group grief counseling are offered to all residents in the community.

The author of this project is the campus pastor at two residences located within thirty miles of a major midwestern metropolitan area. Each residence has approximately 180 individuals of which 60 percent are living independently, that is without assistance, 30 percent are in assisted living, and the remainder receive full care in the memory care unit for persons with dementia. The campus pastor’s role is to develop an ecumenical faith community by providing worship services, Bible study, grief counseling, and dementia support counseling as well as supporting families of residents when deaths occur. The author has dedicated his ministry to caring for the elderly and assisting them with critical spiritual care in times of great need, especially near their death. The

⁷ Sae D. Kwon, “Reducing the Crisis of the Elderly by Means of Bible Study” (DMin thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2004).

average resident will spend a little over five years at the facility, with slightly longer durations for those in independent living.⁸ Thus the years that the campus pastor has with the community must include revolving strategic teaching on the gospel, salvation, biblical inquiry, and a relationship that invites residents to discuss their perceptions and misperceptions.

Death and dying are considerations that each of the residents of the facility face. Campus pastors are being trained for a program called “Honoring Choices” that allows for open conversations between residents and family members concerning end-of-life issues. Community members face the issue of death often as each month may find a neighbor or friend has died. Many residents attend a “Procession of Honor” upon the death of a community member as their body is wrapped with a quilt and they are prayed over by a member of the staff before the body leaves the facility. This time has been a somber and reflective moment for all members of the community no matter if they have been a participant in faith activities or not. The week following the death of a resident has provided campus pastors with the opportunity to discuss death, mortality, and the faith of individual community members. Residents have been much more likely to agree to attend a worship service following the death of one of their peers. Studies show that when people regularly attend church services, the mortality rate decreases by over 30 percent.⁹

The “peers” are not necessarily lifelong friends. Part of the social landscape in which residents find themselves at the facility is a community of strangers that have collectively experienced several significant life changes before their arrival. It is common for new residents to have experienced a significant health episode such as a fall, loss of a spouse, nonrenewal of a driver’s license, candid and often difficult conversations with their adult children about moving to a

⁸ Resident Census, May 2019.

⁹ Terrence D. Hill et al., “Religious Attendance and Mortality: An 8-Year Follow-Up of Older Mexican Americans,” *Journals of Gerontology* 60, no. 2 (2005): 102–9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/60.2.s102>.

resident facility and selling their home, and the leaving behind of familiar communities, pets, neighbors, and friends. When residents enter the facility, some may anticipate building new friendships with others in a safe environment that has all amenities contained under one roof.¹⁰ Wolff states that elderly persons have a “pervasive drive to seek and maintain friendships.”¹¹ Other new residents may be fearful and apprehensive about meeting new people, especially if they are not used to living in such close proximity to other people such as having an apartment directly on either side of them.

The residents complete demographic information upon entry so the campus pastor has access to their indicated faith background. More than 40 percent of residents cite Catholicism as their background, followed by Lutherans, Methodists, others, and Presbyterians. The vast majority have lived only a short distance from the facility. Since the cost begins at \$2,300 a month, they are financially stable or have prepared for this level of care earlier in their lives. Since they are local, many of their former pastors or priests visit or hold worship or prayer services at the facilities.

This new community is not racially or culturally diverse, but residents find that their limitations of mobility in transit lead to more encounters with other residents in places like dining areas, life enrichment activities, worship services, and impromptu mailroom meetings for which they had little choice in building relationships with their new neighbors. Residents have come from a community that afforded them the opportunity to choose a church that reflected their history, location, and neighborhood. For Catholics and Lutherans, they had between five and ten churches that could meet their denominational needs within five miles of their home. However, upon arrival

¹⁰ François-Charles Wolff, “Well-Being of Elderly People Living in Nursing Homes: The Benefits of Making Friends,” *Kyklos: International Review for Social Sciences*, 66, no. 1 (2013): 153–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.12015>.

¹¹ Wolff, “Well-Being of Elderly People,” 3.

at their new facility, they found that they could attend a Catholic prayer service led by a deacon at a local Catholic church or a worship service led by the campus pastor of the facility. The prayer service for Catholics may not include all elements of a Catholic mass as it might lack the resources of a liturgy that they were used to receiving along with the missing elements and artifacts normally found in their Catholic church.

The Catholic Church arrived at each resident facility to establish a prayer service, rosary service, and communion service within the first two weeks of opening. In many cases this practice has caused difficulty for the campus pastor to establish rapport and implement strategies to build biblical activities for the residents. In part, some residents may believe that the Catholic deacons serve the “Catholic” residents and the other residents are served by the campus pastor. This idea is not part of the intention but has become the practice. Some campus pastors have difficulty with the Rosary Service believing that it is akin to idol worship as the granting of prayers to Mary are offered and repeated from the leader to the participants. The Catholic members appear to be less likely to join the ecumenical services that are offered each week and favor a Catholic mass if it is offered. Initial findings indicate that there is a feeling of “guilt” in attending a service that is not Catholic.

One of the more difficult obstacles to navigate for the campus pastor is expanding the definition of “Christian” beyond a belief in certain doctrines or submitting to particular ordinances in favor of receiving Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.¹² The elderly affirm that change is harder as they get older. Acceptance of an evangelical Christian perspective for persons that have only known a Catholic perspective, for instance, will require grace. The idea that the elderly have endured many losses including their jobs, moving from parenthood to grandparenthood, lessened physical abilities,

¹² George Sweeting, *How to Begin the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 31.

lessened energy and ability to see and comprehend, and the loss of a spouse create other challenges for teaching and learning the Bible.¹³

Some ordinance issues may be difficult to navigate as Catholic and Lutheran members believe in the transubstantiation or consubstantiation of the Communion elements. Most campus pastors who lead the faith activities hold to a memorial view of the elements and cite that they represent, but are not changed into, the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. This sensitive issue, if not explained and spoken of delicately, can dissuade Catholic and Lutheran members from attending faith activities and also reaching out to the campus pastor for spiritual comfort or biblical answers when needed.

Some residents have noted that they have not attended a church in the past five to ten years due to mobility or transportation problems. While the metropolitan area has a system of public transit, the communities that surround it, including the facility in question, do not have bus service or a developed public transit system. Other widowed women also explained that their husband did most of the driving and when he died they did not increase their ability to drive independently. For some residents a re-introduction into church and faith activities is necessary so that they might feel welcomed and comfortable engaging with other community members in church-related functions once again.

As was mentioned previously, men may be less likely to participate in the study because they look to express their faith differently and a notion of a “personal faith” in Jesus is not language that most of them have used to describe their faith journey. The most popular activity for the men is playing cards and their game of choice is Sheephead, a Bavaria-originated game of five players the

¹³ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Quick Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 33.

object of which is to gain 61 points through a series of tricks.¹⁴ Very few of the men are able to be physically active, and even though there are golf courses next to or near the facilities, most men are not able to play any longer. The subject matter and illustrations used in multi-generational churches no longer resonate with the elderly, widows, and widowers of the facility. The Bible illustrations that center upon families, marriages, and current popular culture do not resonate with the residents and may lead to a discontinuity in attending worship services. In teaching Bible lessons, the campus pastors are instructed to strike a balance in the community to stir participation and widespread interest in spiritual activities.

The “good” factor will be an obstacle in the teaching of biblical truth to many Catholic and Lutheran residents. Stanley sums this up by stating, “The logic flows something like this: there is a good God who lives in a good place reserved for good people ... and the criteria for making it to this good place is to be good.”¹⁵ Residents may have heard teaching on *sola gratia* and have an understanding of what Christ’s work on the cross was intended to bring to the world. However, when residents are asked directly, “If you died today would you go to heaven?,” the popular answer of residents is “I hope so.” When pressed to give an explanation of this, they usually offer three rationales for goodness: church attendance, their notion of “good behavior” by themselves, and their definition of a “good God” that allows their entry. While many of the uncertain residents are Catholic, some Catholic residents have a greater biblical foundation and have uncovered the certainty of God in scripture that aligns with an assurance of salvation.

One common thread between genders and even cognitive abilities of the residents is music. Surveys conducted by the campus pastor in both the resident facilities indicate that the residents

¹⁴ Erica M. Rosch, *A Field Guide to Sheepshead* (Oregon, WI: Badger Books, 2001), 7.

¹⁵ Andy Stanley, *Since Nobody’s Perfect, How Good is Good Enough?* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2009), 10.

prefer hymn music to other forms of worship music and believe it to be an essential part of their worship experience. They have also stated that they prefer piano to guitar, and live piano music is of greater interest to them than having recorded music play as they sing and worship. Faith activities are offered to all three of the resident groups: independent living, assisted living, and memory care.

All three groups attend the weekly worship service, and a specialized service is offered weekly for the memory care residents that consists mainly of hymns and prayer. The eighteen residents in memory care have dementia and receive the highest level of twenty-four-hour care at the facility. Other than the worship service, they do not interact with the other residents of the facility and are housed in a separate wing with a keypad locked door to prevent wandering. The gathering of the entire community for worship is an activity for which members from each group have expressed enjoyment. The combining of residents with different cognitive and physical abilities and disabilities has been a blessing and a difficult reminder to some. Many of the independent residents see themselves graduating to assisted living or to memory care during their time of residence. It is a point of reflection that the campus pastor can make to the residents individually or as a group that life is delicate and a sudden downturn in health may occur. As the residents illustrate this reality, the pastor is able to attach spiritual lessons to real end-of-life scenarios. The elderly population appears to be responsive to this teaching.

There are some advantages to working with an older adult population that their younger peers do not enjoy. They are from a generation that understands and respects roles in leadership and followership. They can be instructed and can be relied upon to follow that instruction. If the campus pastor were to assign reading a particular scripture one week, he would not be surprised to find that all members read that scripture at the next week's meeting. The revelation will come when the

elderly residents consider a personal Jesus apart from their prejudices and preferences such as activities on Sunday and the conformity to external codes of dos and don'ts.¹⁶

The administration of the facility offered its cooperation in allowing this study to be conducted. The research was conducted within one of the facilities in which the campus pastor offers weekly worship services and Bible studies and questions were reviewed by the site administrator as well as by a group of residents that agreed to the task. The results of this study will be offered to the other 48 facilities of the organization so that they may consider options to improve and enhance the biblical literacy of their residents.

Problem Presented

The problem this project addressed was that the elderly residents of this particular nondenominational resident facility face a spiritual crisis as they lack specific understanding in one of three areas: accepting the Bible as true, understanding God as trustworthy, and feeling certain about salvation after death. Research demonstrates that young people in the millennial generation have less familiarity with the Bible than those from previous generations.¹⁷ The implication is that the church must address the deficiency among the millennials so that they can come closer to the understanding of their elders. However, the elders of today do not have the same biblical understanding of their parents or grandparents. The understanding of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture for the Greatest Generation, Silent Generation, and Baby-Boomer generation has also decreased with the emergence of the next generation.¹⁸

¹⁶ Joseph Stowell, *Following Christ: Experiencing Life the Way It Was Meant to Be* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 11.

¹⁷ George Barna, *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura: The Barna Group, 2016), 19.

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," May 30, 2014, accessed August 24, 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/11/201.11.03_rls_ii_questionnaire.pdf.

Concern then, may be misappropriated among the research as those that need biblical truth most critically are those that are closest to eternity. The average lifespan in the United States is now 78.7 years and the average age for residents in the facility is 84 years.¹⁹ As these particular residents exceed the expected lifespan for the United States in general, the end of life is an ever-present topic of consideration. The gap in understanding of even one of the three spiritual truths and the expected mortality for the residents creates an urgency for establishing an intentional ecumenical teaching plan that can meet the needs of the 160 residents that come from religious backgrounds that include Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and no religious affiliation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to understand the biblical limitations and spiritual gaps of a group of elderly persons in a resident community and, using research and best practices, develop an ecumenical plan to provide essential knowledge and training of the most important issues related to living an authentic Christian life. The research project focused on three specific spiritual issues the elderly face because they are problems that can be identified through surveying and resident interviews. Once identified, the deficiencies can be effectively addressed through small group discussions and targeted sermons offered at the weekly worship service. The program is intended to be cyclical in that new residents are moving in as other residents move to another area of care or become deceased. Lessons that are repeated would be refreshed to include new illustrations and a broader offering according to the needs uncovered by the campus pastor of the new residents. Ultimately this project intends to counter that, with proper training and exposure to biblical truth to build upon, participants will emerge with an understanding of God's purpose, which eventually will lead to trusting that they might know their destination upon death. Many of the elderly residents that

¹⁹ Presbyterian Homes and Services, *Rise Up: 2018 Annual Report*, January 2019.

have not yet been taught salvation from 1 John 5:11–13, John 10:28, Ephesians 2:8–9, and Romans 10:9 can move from a perception of uncertainty to assurance for a believer and follower of Jesus Christ to be saved.

This project has a dual benefit as it aligns with the mission of the facility to present clarity of biblical truth to the resident community and reproducibility of a process to the forty-eight other sites whose campus pastors have identified “biblical illiteracy” as an urgent issue during their May 2019 functional work group. More importantly, this study intended to correct common fallacies and inerrant teachings of the Bible so that elderly are better prepared as they enter eternity.

Basic Assumptions

Honest and truthful responses were expected from the respondents of the study. They received instruction including written and verbal outlines of the process within both individual and group settings. It was expected that some of the individuals would not retain the information or remember when the sessions were being held. Signs as well as reinforcement of the process by the campus pastor, the receptionist, the life enrichment director, and by the site administrator were offered during the monthly community meeting to help remind residents of the sessions.

The topics discussed were of a sober nature. Great care was taken to present questions and topics in a manner that was engaging and inviting for those to participate. Some residents lived eighty-four years and held to a previous assumption about heaven or death and the notion of changing that assumption was jarring or unpalatable for them initially. It was reasonable that the researcher felt some participants required more debriefing than the planned thirty-minute session to conclude the project. The campus pastor was at their disposal for additional counseling and prayer to reveal more truth to the residents who were yet uncertain or confused about what was taught.

This customized study was meant for use within two of the five facilities within one state in the midwestern region. It was intended to inform the general baseline of biblical literacy of the residents and adjustments that were made to increase their knowledge. If the demographics of the region were to change or a new generation such as Generation X were to inhabit the facility, the results of this study would not necessarily be replicable.

The researcher believed that recruitment of males would be difficult for this study and other such similar projects. Elderly males do not attend religious services in great numbers and it is difficult to entice them to participate in a study of any length that includes Bible training and theological concepts. It was assumed that the hypothesis of a decrease in spiritual gap of Bible knowledge among participants would decrease as a result of the training and attention given to the subject. It was less certain whether the other hypothesis of reducing gaps in trusting God and fear of death/understanding of assurance of salvation would be realized by the participants. The researcher also expected that the participants would become increasingly engaged in the acquisition of knowledge and ask more questions in each successive session.

Additionally, the researcher expected that not all of the participants chosen for the “Food for Thought” teaching sessions would be able to complete them. The average age for the participants in the study was projected to be the same as the mean age at the facility, which was about eighty-five years at the time of the study. The chances that ten to fifteen elderly participants would have been able to attend and complete all three sessions and a follow-up interview, noting the instances of illness, hospital stays, and death, appeared to be less than certain before the study began.

Definitions

Below is a list of terms used throughout this research project that may not be understood by the reader outside of this unique focus. These are given to assist the reader in the context and focus of the topic.

Aging paradigm – the biblical examples of old age that lead to an understanding of issues in faith.²⁰

Assisted living – residents that need basic assistance in dressing, eating, doing laundry, and transportation.²¹

Assurance – freedom from doubt.²²

Authority of the Bible – all the words of the Bible are actually God’s words.²³

Biblical theology – “a biblical view of God who gives meaning and coherence to this world in His personal acts of history.”²⁴

Clarity of Scripture – those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation.²⁵

Gerontology – the study of aging and the problems of the aged.²⁶

²⁰ V. Gordon Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14.

²¹ Kevin Eckert, *Inside Assisted Living the Search for Home* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 3.

²² Matthew Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation: Implications of a New Testament Theology of Hope* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2010), 5.

²³ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: 20 Basics Every Christian Should Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 13.

²⁴ G. F. Hasel, “Biblical Theology Movement,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 163.

²⁵ Westminster Assembly, “Chapter 1,” Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster3.i.i.html>.

²⁶ Marty Martinson and Clara Berridge, “Successful Aging and Its Discontents: A Systematic Review of the Social Gerontology Literature,” *The Gerontologist* 55, no. 1 (2015): 58.

Ecumenical – pertains to the entire inhabited world and cooperation among Christian denominations to seek spiritual unity.²⁷

Heaven – destination or goal for believers in Christ, substitution for “salvation” for those unfamiliar with the term; the abode of God.²⁸

Independent living – accepting help at hand; doing things alone; having family, friends, and money as resources; and preserving physical and mental capacities.²⁹

Memory care – residential nursing care for persons with dementia in the low to medium range that may include bathing, toileting, and acuity care.³⁰

Necessity of Scripture – it is necessary to read the Bible or have someone explain the meaning of it so that God can be known personally, sins can be forgiven, and God’s direction can be clear.³¹

Practicing Christians – self-identified Christians who say their faith is very important in their lives and who have attended worship service within the last month.³²

Sufficiency of Scripture – Scripture as the ultimate and final authority for Christian living and theology which includes divine revelation of the Holy Spirit leading to salvation.³³

²⁷ C. Raith II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the Perplexed (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567661845>.

²⁸ J. Merritt, “Asking the Clergy: What is Your Definition of Heaven?” *Newsday*, January 30, 2016.

²⁹ A. D. Beswick et al., “Complex interventions to improve physical function and maintain independent living in elderly people: A systematic review and meta-analysis,” *The Lancet* 371, no. 9614 (2008): 725–35, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)60342-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60342-6).

³⁰ P. Carder et al., “Characteristics of Assisted Living, Residential Care, and Memory Care Residents in Oregon,” *The Gerontologist* 55, no. Suppl_2 (November 2015): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv327.04>.

³¹ Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 16.

³² Barna, *The Bible in America*, 68.

³³ S. A. Gleason, “Sufficiency of Scripture: A Formulation of the Definition of Scripture’s Sufficiency with Application to Biblical Counseling” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

Mary Sweat, a nurse, explains that in her profession she may treat an illness or symptoms that go along with it, but may find that there is a spiritual care component that is missing. In this regard she suggests that the patient should be a “guide and a teacher.”³⁴ This research project explored a campus pastor’s search for spiritual gaps among elderly residents in community living and did so in a manner that allowed the residents to direct and guide. If the supposition is true that depression is one of the most serious illnesses shared by older adults, this depression may be magnified in elderly over the age of eighty-five who face a looming eternity and may lack certainty of where they will spend it.³⁵ The work of the researcher was meant to provide an efficient solution for helping elderly residents who live with difficulty due to grieving the loss of a spouse, being limited in their physical abilities to comprehend and accept change, and facing their nearness to death.

Limitations

Each individual resident of the facility gave consent to the organization to use one’s information for any specific purpose. The guidelines for soliciting the assistance of residents for a project like this required a mailing with a consent. The final result of the number of participants was determined by the consenting individuals or powers of attorney that agreed to participate in the study. During the sixteen weeks of preparing, informing, organizing the sample group, and instructing in biblical essentials, it was considered that not all of the participants may make it to the conclusion of the study. It was common to expect that some would experience illness, death, or simply forget that a session was scheduled. The study was not a random sample of residents

³⁴ Mary T. Sweat, “What Are the Gaps in Spiritual Care?” *Journal of Christian Nursing : A Quarterly Publication of Nurses Christian Fellowship* 28, no. 2 (2011): 112.

³⁵ Bayu Anggileo Pramesona and Surasak Taneepanichskul, “The Effect of Religious Intervention on Depressive Symptoms and Quality of Life among Indonesian Elderly in Nursing Homes: A Quasi-Experimental Study,” *Clinical Interventions in Aging* 13 (2018): 473–83.

because some residents were not able to affirm that they wanted to participate, regardless of their status as an independent or assisted living resident. Also, residents were not chosen if they had memory loss and were awaiting entry into the memory care unit. However, it was impossible to predict with perfect certainty that those chosen did not have dementia that may have impaired their ability to learn the concepts of the study even after its completion.

This study was limited by the demographic composition of the facility, consisting of suburban residents who had lived most of their lives near the resident facility. There was little diversity of ethnicity within this study, but it may lead to other researchers' curiosity about the cultural, socioeconomic, and regional viability of including intentional biblical activities into their senior adult communities. George Barna provides information that some ethnic groups may have a greater interest in faith building activities than others. In this case, researchers may want to develop a study that would optimize their elderly population to pursue biblical literacy and gather more information on the predictability of religious participation based on ethnicity.

In like manner, there was an economic uniformity to this group of residents. The men and women of the facility had savings, pensions, or family resources that cover the \$30,000 or more annual cost of living in the residence. Although this study did not focus on the spiritual profundity based on economic condition, it would be a worthy endeavor to consider this factor and the difficulty or ease of elderly that come from wealth or poverty to adjust a belief system that has led them to their present situation.

This paper could not address each element that might define biblical literacy. Due to the urgent nature of the ages of those participating, an emphasis on salvation, the gospel narrative, sin, grace, and knowledge of heaven and hell provided the focal point of instruction. Although the residents are defined as "elderly," they could include as much as a thirty-year gap between their

ages. They will not be defined by their age as much as the similarity in the biblical understanding that they have.

Delimitations

This study was limited to independent and assisted living residents and did not ask the residents with dementia to participate in the study. While many of the residents with dementia have cognitive abilities that would allow them to respond, answer questions, and appreciate an increase in biblical literacy, there is a good degree of certainty for decline in cognitive ability that may have skewed the outcome of the study. However, those in memory care were able to access the teaching and the information that was presented to others in the study. They, too, were able to increase their biblical literacy through the spiritual disciplines given in this study.

While worship at the facility constituted a “church” setting and many residents believed this worship to be their church, the growth that was measured was individual rather than communal. A church would want to see biblical literacy and its influence on the members to become reproducers of the faith that are strong in evangelism. This would fulfill the Great Commission and the mission that many churches have to worship, grow, and share. This study, however, intended to limit the range to gaps in biblical truth and the individual measurement of growth in Bible concepts, scriptural truth, and comfort and certainty in God’s word. This course of research was chosen because there was a time limitation as the community changes due to deaths and new residents moving in to take the vacancies. For this matter, the study needed to be limited in its scope and reproducible so that the new residents could benefit from the spiritual insight.

Furthermore, the study was confined to one facility rather than using both sites. The locations of the sites are not being divulged in order to further protect the identity of the residents. While both site directors have cited their interest in their communities participating in the study, the

campus that will not be studied has a church on site. The Presbyterian Church provides the Sunday worship for this community and adding additional services for the intervention at this site is not recommended. Therefore, one site will serve as the pilot facility for the study and other considerations will be determined at a later date as to its feasibility for the three other state locations.

The researcher received IRB approval on January 30, 2020, and planned to begin the study on February 16, 2020 with the group information session. The data was collected prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic on March 17, 2020, which had served to eliminate any group gathering of elderly residents. The group meetings were completed before the outbreak and the individual follow-up sessions were also concluded before the outbreak had changed meeting policies within the facility. The continuation of the group to learn other biblical topics that was requested by the members was postponed until a later date when group gatherings would be safe for the elderly residents.

Organization of the Study

The project drew from literature in diverse areas such as gerontology, theology, demography, and social science in order to give thorough insight into the group being studied and their beginning gap in biblical discernment. As the literature, theological truth, and past and current theories provided the groundwork, this study proceeded with an invitation to all residents in the facility to discover their basic biblical knowledge and beliefs in a group gathering. That information was collected and parsed through a selection of the “most in need” demonstrated by deficiencies uncovered in the survey. This small group was taught using the Bible and the most effective methods known to teach elderly learners. After the three lessons in a small group were completed, they were each given the identical survey to determine if they were able to retain biblical

understanding and apply it to the issues of death and assurance of salvation. All study participants received individual debriefing to help them assess what they had either acquired or lacked. Finally, implications for future studies will be offered in anticipation that this work might continue to include other facilities and other geographic regions.

Thesis Statement

As a result of this research and work, three specific areas were considered vital in understanding the elderly resident's perceptions of fearing death and salvation. Each area was coupled with a corresponding lesson to be taught in a small group setting that addressed the gap in knowledge. Therefore, Bible teaching focused on the truth of the Bible, the trust in God and the assurance of salvation can result in demonstrated cognitive understanding of a needed correction at end-of-life that results in verbal affirmation of biblical faith. The caveat to results is the presence of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit prompted this research to begin, He must prompt each soul to know the difference between the "Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."³⁶

³⁶ 1 John 4:1–6.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The elderly population is rising, and society has been taking note of the influence and resources that this group will use in the future. The growth of the United States population beyond age sixty-five exceeds that of the total population and the group under age sixty-five.³⁷ The spotlight of interest in this group has not only developed as a result of their immense size but also because of their greater participation in the workforce and as a legion of registered voters in local and national elections.³⁸ In a practical sense, then, the elderly population must be considered prominent. Projections of the increase in longevity give cause to ponder what changes the world may see. For the Christian minister, this large contingent of voters, workers, and retirees are souls that have an appointment with an eternal destination ahead of their younger counterparts.

The literature considers issues that relate to a specific group of elderly residents but may characterize the elderly, in general, and other groups of people as well. Salvation is the core issue that must be contended with in this work, and as such may not be universally defined in the same manner for each Christian denomination. William Tyndale broke salvation down into the work of the Trinity stating that God the Father elected those that would be set apart and born again, Jesus, the Son, shed His blood on the cross so that man's salvation would be possible, and the Holy Spirit

³⁷ Andrew Roberts et al., "A Snapshot of the Fast-Growing U.S. Older Population," United States Census Bureau (October 30, 2018), accessed March 24, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/snapshot-fast-growing-us-older-population.html>.

³⁸ Ibid., 95.

“sprinkles the blood of Christ on the elect to achieve their salvation.”³⁹ While salvation is a biblical concept, reformers Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin might have emphasized different elements of the truth. However, they found common ground with Tyndale in that the work of salvation was in the hands of God and not by the works of men. The distinction of this particular element lies in the relationship of the certainty of God’s work and Jesus’ sacrifice and the belief that destination heaven can be known and was given to be known in Scripture.

The certainty of the afterlife can be either of great comfort or cause for grave concern. Fear of death is different than the fear of the pain that precedes death. Fear of death can be more than unsettling for octogenarians as death is more of a certainty, and those living in resident facilities will likely find their death in the facility. If fearing death might be tied to a gap in biblical understanding, it is possible that the elderly may be spared this needless suffering in exchange for informed belief. Therefore, a study of fear of death accompanies this review as it relates to the elderly.

It is documented that the elderly in residence facilities experience many changes in a rather short duration before arriving at their apartment. The spiritual change is one of the unique challenges in that they may not have had the opportunity to live in such close proximity to people that have different belief systems for their spiritual lives. Many may have enjoyed spending a majority of their time in community with those of the same religious denomination. And in their resident facility they may live in the apartment next to someone with a different belief system. The denominational distinctions are explored in the following review and their implications for the study are noted.

³⁹ Ralph Werrell, *The Roots of William Tyndale’s Theology* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2013), 102.

Literature Review

Presented here is a list of scriptures that provide the foundation for this project. They emphasize the aged and the issues of this research: the Bible as truth, fear of death, and certainty of salvation.

Scriptures Addressing the Aged and Urgency of Faith

Age and Elderly

Proverbs 16:31

“Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.” There is a value to long life and the Bible reflects aging leading to a righteous life. Others should take note of those that have lived long in righteousness and honor and respect them.⁴⁰

Isaiah 46:4

“Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.” God cares for the elderly and, despite the thought that tragic suffering of afflictions to the aged such as dementia, stroke, cancer, loss of a spouse, loss of their health and other obstacles, God asserts that He will bear their burden and is consistent throughout their lifetimes.

Psalms 92:14

“They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.” This verse speaks to the purpose and utility of the elderly person. They can still bear fruit of the Holy Spirit and thus can

⁴⁰ Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15–31* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34.

still be useful in evangelizing for the Kingdom of God. The imagery calls to mind the fertility and vitality of a tree that still has great value.⁴¹

Psalm 71:18

“So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.” Here, the Psalmist, occupying the position of an aged person, recognizes his own responsibility in old age and the opportunity to proclaim the news of God to presumably a younger generation.

Psalm 71:9

“Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent.” The ancient times afforded no special provision for the elderly. This is a very clear statement that with old age comes a deterioration of the physical self and the energy that once was with youth, is gone in old age.

Leviticus 19:32

“You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.” This key verse, one of eight such verses that combine to make up the biblical framework of the elderly residence studied in this project, conveys the command that one should respect and love older people. The second Temple suggests that “he who receives and takes care of an old man is rewarded as if he received and sought God.”⁴²

⁴¹ P. Mailberger, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament XI* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 384.

⁴² Charles Ellicott, *Ellicott's Bible Commentary for English Readers*, volume 1 (Harrington, DE: Delmarva Publications, 2015), 832.

Psalm 90:10

“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” Interestingly, even the ancients lived a lifespan similar to what people know today. This honest verse gives credence to the issue that life is brief and that each person will face an eternity after his or her life is over.

Job 5:26

“You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, like a sheaf gathered up in its season.” Job brings to mind a satisfaction that one might have in old age. Being “gathered up in season” calls one to live to an appropriate old age. It seems that is God’s desire for most of His creation and for believers there is an accompanying satisfaction for reaching this destination.

Titus 2:2

“Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.” Paul teaches a younger Titus that older men should be centered on the faith with character traits that reflect maturity, in particular love. An older man, then, acting like a younger man and using his time to chase after the worldly things that younger men pursue, would not be a dignified man.

Philemon 1:9

“Yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus.” In his old age Paul demonstrates humility to be able to say that he is a slave to Jesus. Many older people may be stuck in pride and unable to surrender their lives to Jesus. Paul demonstrates that he can be humble but also that he is useful as a peacemaker that can reunite two brothers in the faith.

Luke 2:37

“And then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” Luke tells of the virtue for an older woman that might not lose everything even towards the end of her life when her husband is gone. She still can draw close to God and intercede for others and live a life replete with prayer.

Certainty of the Bible

Proverbs 30:5

“Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” Truth comes from the word of God that is in the Bible. This truth from the Bible will be a shield for those that need to deflect deception and falsehood from systems and worldly thinking that can corrupt the mind.

Deuteronomy 4:2

“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you.” Commonly misquoted for selfish purposes or from a lack of rigor, the Bible stands on its own merit as the source to know God’s laws and His truth. Sayings such as “To thine own self be true” and “Pride comes before the fall” do not reflect biblical truth.

2 Timothy 3:16

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Those not biblically trained may not accept all of the Bible as truth. This would be in conflict with Paul’s statement to Timothy in this verse. If a person believes that God is perfect and without error, that idea must be reconciled with this verse, in which Paul

attributes all Scripture coming from a perfect God; therefore, all Scripture should be perfect in its intention and meaning.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” No mere book can do what the author of Hebrews attributes to the Bible. This “living Word” has characteristics of God and has the ability to lead the reader of it to right living and also convict the reader of his or her sin.

2 Peter 1:21

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” A person cannot simply create the Bible; to attempt to do so would be utterly foolish. The Bible was supernaturally given to people who faithfully carried the message verbally, in writing and later, to print.

Certainty of God

Isaiah 40:28

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.” The question Isaiah poses is an important one. To know of and hear of God correctly would mean that one understands that God is the Creator of all things. As he states, “understanding God totally is not possible,” as there are differences to be aware of between the creation and the Creator.

Isaiah 44:6

“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” A popular bumper sticker touts “coexist” to those

that view it. The notion is that all beliefs can live harmoniously together under one roof. Isaiah does not leave that option open in this verse. If one God is right, then others are false.

Jeremiah 10:10

“But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.” One of the Lord’s prophets underscores God’s intention for ruling and being the source of making nations aware of His presence. This gives the believer, nominal believer, and unbeliever a moment to pause and consider if they are under God’s wrath or favor.

Revelation 1:8

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’” God speaks for Himself and in doing so explains that people should not wait for another as He is the One that is here and will always be here.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This concise message of the gospel is known by Christians and non-Christians alike. It speaks to God’s purpose and character. This verse also speaks to the person that might not believe that God is approachable. However, after doing this work, why would a person not be able to approach a God that loves so completely?

Assurance of Salvation

John 5:24

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” Jesus speaks this from authority being God. One must either accept Jesus as God or consider Him as C. S. Lewis

mused, “a lunatic on the level of a man that considers himself a poached egg.”⁴³ There is no intermediate step in Jesus’ plan that would include something such as “purgatory.”

John 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John the Baptizer defers to Jesus as the Messiah. He also provides a certainty for eternity for believers and unbelievers alike.

Matthew 24:11–13

“And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Matthew describes that a persistence until the end is required to be saved. The persistence denotes a certainty that the acceptance of Jesus was indeed genuine. A genuine believer would not be swayed by a false prophet.

Ephesians 2:8–9

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” The salvation that God offers does not depend on man’s goodness for that would contradict Scripture. Salvation is truly a gift that one can receive through faith in Jesus.

John 10:28

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Jesus states that He is the giver of eternal life, which may conflict with church teachings that

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Harper One, 1980), 40–41.

some have received that include obedience to church tradition or other elements. This verse also suggests that a true believer cannot be swayed away from God.

1 John 5:11–13

“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”

This verse gives great clarity to knowing that one is saved and also understanding that the source of that salvation is Jesus. As with other passages, the reverse is also true. Not knowing Christ will result in eternal damnation, of life apart from God, which is no life at all.

Romans 10:9

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Some may suggest that Romans 10:9 is too easy a road by which to explain salvation. The “heart” is the center of truth and also can be impenetrable in terms of pride. This may be the most difficult of all tests of faith.

Romans 10:13

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” No sin exempts a person from the opportunity to come to God and enjoy eternity with Him. There are no people groups nor are there individuals that cannot accept this offer of grace at any time during their earthly lives.

The Literature

The literature presented in the section to follow develops a framework to examine why the elderly face a spiritual crisis if they have not grown up with an understanding of the Bible. Biblical illiteracy, the effects of aging, and the benefits of faith to the elderly are supported by the literature, and key departures and exclusions are noted.

Biblical Illiteracy

According to Barna's 2016 landmark study on biblical practices, only 24 percent of the respondents thought the Bible should be taken literally while 25 percent believed that the Bible either was simply another book or should not be taken literally.⁴⁴ Barna measures biblical literacy within the church by looking at adults in the United States that are eighteen years of age or older. In the entire population, only half hold what Barna considers a "high view of the Scriptures."⁴⁵ Stetzer concurs that biblical literacy is getting worse. He cited a LifeWay Research study that documented that of those who regularly attended church, 65 percent read their Bibles less than once a week, which led Stetzer to conclude that America is living in a post-biblically literate culture.⁴⁶ As important as it is to understand the research of a decline in church attendance and Bible reading, the candid nature of the response to the questions is telling as well. It appears that the American public is not coy about pronouncing its own disinterest in these activities as reported by Barna and LifeWay. Neither offered evidence of the motivation or impetus for the public reading the Bible one time per week. The distinction of "reading" the Bible and "having the Bible read to you" was not made clear. It is possible that some respondents considered the reading of the Word during a weekly church worship service their time for Bible reading. Therefore, the question of motivation for reading the Bible is left unclear. It may be part of an external ritual that accompanies church attendance or it may be an internal need to draw closer to God.

The research completed by Barna in 2016 and LifeWay in 2014 uses similar criteria to determine what "biblically literate" encompasses. From Bible reading to biblical knowledge of

⁴⁴ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 22.

⁴⁵ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 22.

⁴⁶ Ed Stetzer, "Dumb and Dumber: How Biblical Illiteracy is Killing Our Nation," *Charisma Magazine*, October 2014, 17.

characters, stories, and numbers, they both provide substantial evidence that the individuals (Barna: 12,000 individual respondents) and churches (LifeWay: 4,000 church members) are experiencing a downturn in interest and aptitude for the Bible. Berding's anecdotal study⁴⁷ of seminary students matched the findings found in Barna and Stetzer in terms of defining biblical literacy; Berding's study also added depth to uncovering the problem by discovering distractions, misplaced priorities, unwarranted overconfidence, and the pretext of being too busy. The distractions cited invariably included use of modern technology for entertainment purposes. The literature is not specific in delineating generational distractions, priorities, and busyness. The elderly may have similar problems related to biblical literacy born out of different circumstances. For example, the busyness that has a thirtysomething mother going from a job to caring for the home and family might be contrasted with the busyness of a new widow who must learn to balance a checkbook along with weekly doctor visits while feeling physically exhausted.

The LifeWay study has limitations as it does not distinguish biblical literacy among denominations but rather describes the practice among all practicing churchgoers. Thomas Reese addresses the issue from a Catholic perspective as he found that the number one reason why 71 percent of Catholics left the church was that their spiritual needs were not being met by the church. Reese's investigation determined that converts to evangelical churches are more interested in "spiritual nourishment than doctrinal issues."⁴⁸ Interestingly, Barna found that only 27 percent of Catholics read the Bible weekly or more often while 70 percent of practicing Christians are engaged in Bible reading that often.⁴⁹ This data impacted the study of the elderly in this project's residence

⁴⁷ Kenneth Berding, *Bible Revival: Recommitting Ourselves to One Book* (Wooster: Weaver Book, 2013), 27.

⁴⁸ Thomas Reese, "The Hidden Exodus: Catholics Becoming Protestants," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 18, 2011, 7.

⁴⁹ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 74.

as the majority of residents are Catholic. The data lacking from Barna, Reese, and Stetzer is the historical trend for elderly and their biblical literacy. While Barna's study reveals that older adults beyond sixty-five years old read the Bible in greater numbers than their younger counterparts, no historical data is provided to suggest they do so in greater or less measure than the elderly of decades past.

The Effects of Aging

Biblical uncertainty may affect every age group; however, the elderly have specific impediments that may hinder their pursuit of the faith. Harris centers his research exclusively on the elderly. His findings stem from examining the Bible as a sort of visioning for the problems and concerns of contemporary older adults. He suggests looking at the elderly in context of the young old (65–74), the middle old (75–84) and the older old (85 and older) to reflect the transitions of aging as they are given in biblical narratives.⁵⁰ The data gathered suggests that the elderly lack or lose certain cognitive functions or have impediments that make the building of their faith challenging. In practical terms, this suggests that elderly may have difficulty seeing, and reading might cause frustration. If elderly residents, therefore, have not engaged in reading as a life habit up to the point of their diminished capacity, it would be difficult to engage them in reading the Bible to increase their knowledge. Conversely, Harris provides a conclusion to biblical research that summarizes elderly as more than stereotypical geezers with physical problems. If his conclusion that the appropriate position for the elderly is to reestablish themselves as the teachers of Godly wisdom for the young is valid, how are they to get there?⁵¹ The retirement system in the Western

⁵⁰ Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 157–82.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

world would seem to prevent the elderly of today from understanding that they can be vital in teaching because the productive part of their life is ended.

Erichsen and Bussing conducted a study of 1,299 elderly in residential living facilities and found the outcomes of aging in terms of depression and loneliness as a rationale for spiritual needs in elderly living facilities. Harris' stereotypes rang true in their study that found 35 percent described their existence as lonely, 34 percent felt nonintegrated socially, and most struggled with the thought of dying.⁵² The Erichsen and Bussing study included the gender breakdown of 82 percent female and 18 percent male for their respondents. If this is a fairly common demographic for the older elders, more research is needed as to the spiritual effect of spousal loss.

Research documents that spousal loss is a cause of depression and anxiety among the elderly. Krauss' analysis of 1,247 individuals broken down by race and ethnicity finds that religion provides the function of meaning in life to older people and therefore may become more important as people grow older.⁵³ It seems that Krauss indicates a quality of life is improved through religious activity and, specifically, a belief that God provides meaning in life to older people. The participants in this study remarked during their follow-up interviews that they benefitted from this form of religious activity and it led to a general enjoyment in life. This response may prompt other residents to engage as participants in future projects to address their curiosity. The connection between "God" and learning about God through Bible reading, hearing, or experience through others may need to be developed more fully. The biblical concepts of God and what He might provide warrant further investigation to understand the deficit elderly face at the end of life.

⁵² Ibid., 29.

⁵³ Neal Krauss, "Religious Meaning and Subjective Well-Being in Late Life," *Journal of Gerontology* 58B, no. 3 (2003): 161.

Fear and Anxiety

Faith in God has been a source of purpose and meaning to people's lives. "The modern world is a healthier, more comfortable, and more peaceful and more stable place to live in than any of our ancestors in human history knew," states Cardinal Pell⁵⁴. If this is true for the "new elderly" that have outlived their parents by some 15 years or more, this "outliving" could also be characterized by living alone longer as the children of the elderly choose to live apart from their parents. Pell suggests that we prize our individualism highly, and the decline of the tight-knit community and the loosening of the bonds even within the family have produced new forms of suffering that most of us encounter. He asserts that loneliness, uselessness, despair, and a powerful sense of the absurdity of it all are more prevalent than often acknowledged, and "anxiety is in epidemic proportions."⁵⁵

A person may have general fear and anxiety, but to fear death may identify a person's particular belief system. Chappell contends that believers and unbelievers alike may fear "losing innocent control," but unbelievers have a real reason to fear death because they believe that death is "nothingness."⁵⁶ Here the certainty of belief would inevitably be of utmost importance. The trust that a person near death would have just before the moment of death, whether old or young as described in Chappelle's personal near-death experience, has greater substance the closer the person is to death. When a person has an undetermined perspective on the afterlife, it can lead to fear, but Gron terms this "anxiety." When using the term anxiety (as opposed to fear for the future), the author says it is because anxiety has both a "more undetermined and a more wide-ranging character

⁵⁴ George Pell, *God and Caesar: Selected Essays on Religion, Politics & Society* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 137.

⁵⁵ Pell, *God and Caesar*, 137.

⁵⁶ Timothy Chappell, "The Fear of Death," *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1028 (July 2009): 413–23.

than fear. It is an anxiety of catastrophes where life as we know it ceases to exist and maybe even the possibility of human life disappears.”⁵⁷ An anxiety of this kind refers back to an underlying anxiety towards death, like an anxiety towards an impending disaster that ends your life. While there may be no definitive answer to the question of fearing death relating to a faulty belief of Scripture, Chappell addressing the fear of the Christian as having a proverbial “fear of the Lord” at death, but not necessarily of death itself or even of the process of dying.

Denominational Differences

Fear of death may be preceded by an apprehension that is tied to the thought of changing, adding to, or even adjusting a belief system. Rhodes differentiates the “universal church” from the local church by stating that the membership of the former is based on faith in Christ alone while the latter would require that plus any requirements unique to the denomination such as baptism.⁵⁸ Denominational ties have traditionally distinguished their members, and a person’s association with their church denomination gives them an identity and this is more difficult to change than knowledge about the church.⁵⁹ If, therefore, people identify with a certain denomination and they would rather remain affiliated no matter that the organization might change its stance on biblical or social issues, that is a strong tie indeed.

An example may be the lost history of how certain practices or presuppositions of spiritual practice among denominations have come to the present. The Catholic Church disputes long-held Protestant notions that the laity have been prevented from reading and accessing the Bible. In the early 1800s Boston’s *Literary and Catholic Sentinel* reported that the Catholic Church never has

⁵⁷ Arne Gron, *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 3.

⁵⁸ Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2015), 10–11.

⁵⁹ S. Rockwell, “Denominational Identity and Ministerial Identity Congruence within the Foursquare Church” (PhD diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2013).

withheld authentic versions of the Bible from the people.⁶⁰ Whereas some Protestants may believe that Catholics are steeped in tradition to the point that they disregard the notion of being “born-again,” Doane suggests that Catholics are transformed by relationships with Jesus.⁶¹ After a near-death experience and an understanding that God was looking for more than “lip service,” Doane’s father committed his life to Jesus and began reading the Bible and telling people of the work of Jesus.⁶² The Protestant tradition rooted in the formal principle of *sola scriptura* and the material principle of justification is supposed to be straightforward, but Gregersen questions that it may be too abstract.⁶³

The Pew Research Center has found that individuals under forty years of age are less religiously affiliated than their older counterparts.⁶⁴ With the reverse being true, the implications for the elderly that are not able to attend the chosen church of their particular denomination are interesting to consider. If the elderly in planned communities do not find the church affiliation they have left and are not mobile enough to attend such a church, will they choose not to worship or will they adapt and accept what may be offered? The campus pastors and residence life directors of Christian-based elderly communities such as the one studied in this project are wrestling with this question on behalf of their organizations.

⁶⁰ M. L. Mercado, “‘Have You Ever Read?’ Imagining Women, Bibles, and Religious Print in Nineteenth-Century America,” *US Catholic Historian* 31, no. 3 (2013): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cht.2013.0023>.

⁶¹ Peter Doane, *Encounter Jesus: Transforming Catholic Culture in Crisis*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 5.

⁶² Doane, *Encounter Jesus*, 5.

⁶³ N. H. Gregersen and J. Henricksen, “*Sola Scriptura*: The Inclusive Principle,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 55, no. 3 (2016): 184–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12252>.

⁶⁴ Pew Research Center, “Adults Under 40 Are Less Likely to be Religiously Affiliated,” in *The Age Gap in Religion around the World* (June 13, 2018), <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/>.

Distinguishing between Biblical and Religious Issues for the Elderly

This deficit might be aptly determined by a differentiation of the terms “biblical” and “religious.” Caldwell sees that elderly congregations miss the responsibility of becoming equipping stations and disciple makers in favor instead of being more concerned with self-preservation.⁶⁵ This view would contradict Krauss who did not perceive a threat in church religiosity an issue for the elderly to face. Bennett adds to the discussion as he states that an incorrect understanding in religion and an improper functioning of biblical truth (subordinating it to Catholic catechism) would make Scripture of no value at all.⁶⁶ It may be that perceived religiosity or presence of God could lead to contentment of the elderly. However, this underscores the problem of nominal or occasional believers that presume a doctrine of works or social good can get them to heaven as they enter their final years.

The literature themes that emerged from the evidence of Barna, Stetzer, Berding, Caldwell, and Krauss show that biblical literacy can include knowledge of Scripture (such as understanding assurance of salvation), hearing the Word, obeying the Word (such as the practice of prayer), and being transformed by the Word. The elderly share unique deficiencies in getting to that point as evidenced by Harris and Erichsen and Bussing. This is further complicated by what Catholic researchers Bennett and Reese found to be a religiosity among congregants but a frustration that spiritual needs were not being met.

⁶⁵ Connie Ast Caldwell, “Addressing Biblical Illiteracy: A Response to a Growing Concern in the Christian Church” (DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2012), 28.

⁶⁶ Richard Bennett, *Catholicism: East of Eden: Insights into Catholicism for the 21st Century* (Carlisle: Berean Beacon Press, 2010), 23.

Teaching the Elderly the Bible

Elmer Towns uses the analogy of eating in describing the need for regular spiritual nutrition that can only come from the Bible. The idea he professes is that adults should “eat routinely” which he aligns with “eating with dignity.”⁶⁷ Many elderly adults have fallen away from routine reading of the Bible if they had ever begun the practice at all. The speculation with a need for literature and research to address it is that the elderly lose their ability to travel to church, attend church, and are not prompted by a leading minister to read their Bible. It has also been witnessed that elderly may not be able to see as well as they used to with cataracts, partial blindness, and insufficient insurance or optical care coverage in later years correcting the problem. Finally, their younger children, Zabriskie contends, view the Bible as less sacred, exercise more skepticism, take more of a universalist approach to religion, and engage less with the Bible than do elderly adults.⁶⁸

The elderly share a familiarity with the Bible that their younger peers do not. This may be an advantage in teaching them, Cox advises. Since they are familiar with Bible stories and characters, engaging them at a basic level, and even a deeper level might be something that they might participate in readily.⁶⁹ For the teacher or chaplain, the Bible studies that offer the most meaning to the elderly may be the ones that intersect human experience with God’s revelation in Scripture.⁷⁰ Campus pastors for the elderly have long used local illustrations of politics, sporting events, and entertainment from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s to illustrate biblical concepts and teaching. These inferences have normally captured the imagination of the elderly group and have spurred

⁶⁷ Elmer Towns, *How to Create and Present High Impact Bible Studies* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 16, http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/towns_books/27.

⁶⁸ Marek Zabriskie, *Doing the Bible Better: The Bible Challenge and the Transformation of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2014), 121.

⁶⁹ Claude Cox, “Twenty Years of Teaching Bible Study in a Long-term Care Facility,” *Restoration Quarterly* 48 (2006): 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

them to participate in a conversation. It is the conversation that leads to questions and these questions lead the pastor or teacher to a better understanding of what the elderly know and do not know about the truth of Scripture. This is also a rationale for tracking the questions asked in the teaching session of this study.

Gaps in the Literature

The connection between the rationale of the biblical literacy problem and the demographic of the elderly missing that mark needs further study and development. The researcher may also be aided with study on the persisting independent living older adult population and their loss of the ability to drive. This issue may be related to the number of elderly that move to senior living facilities and away from their homes and churches. If this is the case, researchers lack information as to the number of elderly that can no longer attend church worship due to their inability to drive. Likewise, if the elderly must receive donated religious services at their living facility, studies need to be completed to determine if those religious services fulfill the spiritual need of the elderly and answer the question of salvation, eternity after death, and fear of death. The connection between the elderly and their ability to adapt to another church culture or environment is a study that would be valuable to cite. The research is largely silent in these areas.

Theological Foundations

The Bible informs the reader that the elderly may be close to God and have an understanding of His ways. Job laments this as he considers his plight and misfortune. He states, “Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.”⁷¹ If, indeed, wisdom is for the aged, then one might expect that the aged are the wisest among the people. Still, each person will be

⁷¹ Job 12:12.

able to reference a foolish older person as well as a younger person that may be wise. If wisdom comes from God,⁷² one might identify the “best” of wisdom as knowing God and knowing the ways of God. The ways of God come from God’s Word to His people. This declaration came through Jeremiah as the Lord spoke to the people declaring that there would be a covenant between God and Israel that would include His law being placed on the minds and hearts of the people.⁷³

The Bible is replete with older men and women who have left a legacy for their younger peers to follow as they maintained service and devotion to the Lord. Zechariah is an example of a man that has become a faithful priest and has served the Lord in the temple although he is well advanced in years.⁷⁴ Sweeting describes “two godly seniors” in Simeon and Anna, the former patiently waiting and serving God, anticipating the coming of the Messiah, and the latter, an eighty-four-year old prophetess serving day and night in the temple (Luke 2:37).⁷⁵ They did not believe their life to be complete without God and an understanding of the Messiah’s coming. They may have been a fine example to others in their faithful anticipation of the Lord’s coming and their dedicated service to Him throughout their lifetime. If that were to be the life that all lived, the formula for finding God and gaining wisdom would be as elementary as lasting longer and growing older. The Bible, however, illustrates that this is not the case.

Saul was chosen to be King over Israel. When he was younger and about to be anointed as king, he appeared to be humble, naïve, and somewhat interested in recognizing God in his life.⁷⁶ At

⁷² Proverbs 2:6, “For the Lord gives wisdom, out of His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

⁷³ Jeremiah 31:33.

⁷⁴ Luke 1:6–7, 13–17.

⁷⁵ Don Sweeting and George Sweeting, *How to Finish the Christian Life: Following Jesus in the Second Half* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 56.

⁷⁶ 1 Samuel 9:21. Saul is from the smallest tribe, Benjamin, and questions whether Samuel is correct in appointing him king.

the end of Saul's life, if wisdom had taken root, it would be expected that he would demonstrate an increase in understanding for and dedication to God. This is not the case as Samuel records that Saul was presumptively unrighteous in offering a sacrifice to God that was not his place to offer, jealous of the young David that had more success in battle than he, and unrepentant in attempting to murder David, who was following the Lord. Eventually, as an older man, Samuel records that "the Spirit left Saul."⁷⁷

At the end of his life Saul was being defeated in battle. One might expect a wiser and older man of seventy years to call to God for help and expect that God would answer. In 1 Samuel 15:19 Saul is found to have made a mistake in not carrying out God's plan by destroying the Amalekites. He recognizes this after Samuel brings it to his attention but justifies his sin by saying, "I listened to the voice of Yahweh, and went on the mission he sent me ... but the people took the spoil."⁷⁸ In the end Saul died by committing suicide to avoid capture in the battle against the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, during which three of his sons were also killed. Saul was presumably in his seventies and did not grow in the Lord; on the contrary, he became bitter, angry, and was much more concerned with others' opinions of him than he was in consulting the Lord.⁷⁹ Becoming older for Saul was not a guarantee that he would move closer to God in maturity.

Even Samuel, who was a godly man, was not immune to some of the inconsistencies that plague fathers. In his old age he may have expected that his sons would carry out his legacy and be the kind of men that would seek after the Lord and His word. The Bible establishes that he appointed his sons Joel and Abijah as Israel's leaders and they did not follow in his godly ways but

⁷⁷ 1 Samuel 16:14.

⁷⁸ 1 Samuel 15:21.

⁷⁹ There are differences among the Bible translations in offering Saul's age or term as king. The NIV translates 1 Samuel 13:1, "Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years." The NAB translates as follows: "Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel."

rather “turned aside for dishonest gain, accepted bribes and perverted justice.”⁸⁰ Even the godly can produce offspring that do not draw close to the Lord or even heed what they had learned from their parents. Perhaps there is no mandate for “older is wiser,” although there may be an opportunity for the aged to recognize God in the abundance of their years and the example that has been observed by others.

Nicodemus was reckoned to be a senior leader when he is mentioned in John 3. Since he was a ruler of the Jews, it is likely he was older and had amassed much knowledge of the Jewish law and customs. He came to see Jesus at night, possibly because he was curious about the teachings of Jesus but may have been embarrassed to be seen with Jesus and may not have wanted his questions to be known by the public. As a mature teacher in Israel, Jesus would have presumed that he knew the law and may have expected spiritual maturity. However, as Jesus explained being “born of the Spirit” to him, Nicodemus did not understand. The book knowledge that he had received did not translate into spiritual understanding or maturity. While his many years of living and being around the Word of God did not lead to a function of understanding, he was stirred enough to speak with Jesus and talk about the spiritual matters of heaven. In John 19, the curious Nicodemus becomes bold and is not afraid to aid Jesus in death by bringing one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare Jesus’ body for burial.⁸¹

Fear of death, however, comes to the forefront in Hebrews 2. The author states in verse 15 that by understanding the power of Jesus’ death some that “were held in slavery by their fear of death” might be freed. The reader of Hebrews might examine the process of how it is to go from the slavery that holds a person in the form of fear of death to freedom and life. The answer precedes

⁸⁰ 1 Samuel 8:3.

⁸¹ John 19:39.

this question and is given in Hebrews 2:1–3. According to the New International Version, “we must pay careful attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.” Fear of death may be allayed by an informed understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews was writing to Jewish Christians that needed confidence and direction as they faced persecution and a real possibility of being killed for their belief. For many, death was imminent whatever age they were at the time of their conversion, due to their belief. It is possible to fear something even though a person has previously understood that this “something” does not have the power to cause harm. Some children may have experienced an odd-looking person with makeup and strange clothing and may have grown up with a fear of clowns. As adults they may understand that there is nothing to fear, but the “feeling” of fear does not dissipate. Left latent, there may be little for a younger person to fear concerning the immanency of death. For the elderly that understand a life expectancy that they have already eclipsed, death can be a constant focal point. If fear of death is not supported by Scripture and can actually be addressed by a thorough understanding of the gospel message, it may be that the most urgent call is made to those that fear death: those that are imminently close to it.

That is not to say that the Bible has no mention of fear and its utility for the Christian. As Patrick Carrion observes, “Fear plays a huge role in salvation history, from Adam and Eve in the Garden to the fear that many will experience during the last days in the final book of the Bible.”⁸² Fear can be misplaced by being scared of the wrong element while the sacred fear of God is still looming. If the fear of death is a mere religious notion that there is an end to a person’s life and thus relationship with people and possibly God, there is a call for correction. It may be that if the fear

⁸² Patrick M. Carrion, “The Scared and the Sacred: Pushing Past Fear That Often Leads to Amazing Rewards,” *Priest* 75, no. 4 (April 2019): 34–35.

extends to God then, as the one criminal on the cross experienced, there can be hope. Without it, the other criminal had utterly no hope of salvation.

The simplicity or difficulty of assurance of this salvation may be long debated. John 5:24 states plainly, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” The case for salvation seems closed if one hears and believes. When the reader arrives at Hebrews 10:26–27, the issue suddenly does not seem so clear as it reveals, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” Many a believer and nonbeliever are stunned by Matthew 7:21, which states, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” These verses may appear to be in conflict with one another and with Romans 10:9 that gives hope to those that “confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord” and believe in Jesus’ resurrection “will be saved.” The Bible indeed gives certainty of salvation as Andy Stanley’s theory of a “good God” suggests, but the person’s motivation for acceptance of Jesus’ work and his or her purity or humility of heart upon that acceptance appear to play a role. This study also wrestled with the aged and their ability to learn new concepts and put them into practice; their defiance of the adage that “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” was palpable.

The living situation in elderly resident facilities reflects biblical challenges that church leaders may have faced in uniting those that come from varied backgrounds into one church. 1 Corinthians 1:10 appeals to those who may have elevated a practice, belief, teacher, or doctrine above the unifying message of the gospel. “Denominationalism” was not a term used by the writers of Scripture, but they recognized the differences and called for a return to basic and unifying

principles. If there is a way to unite people of different denominational backgrounds, it may be to construct a community by which members are given the opportunity to interact and consider what is most important. O'Brien explains Wesley's search for the truth in Scripture combined with favor for general orthodoxy led to this statement by Wesley:

To candid, reasonable men, I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: Just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, — the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! ⁸³

The balance of concern for an answer to the question of a way to heaven with a lingering obstacle of proposing that eighty-four years of a certain belief system for elderly residents is insufficient, begs for caution. Scripture condemns false teaching but rests clearly on the side of unity as 1 Corinthians 12:13 encourages, "For in One Spirit we are all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." The group of elderly residents studied in this project have similar demographics in terms of age, life expectancy, and generational upbringing, and differences in denominational influence, which affords this project and those that follow it an interesting glimpse into how the Bible can affect belief systems.

The biblical disparity among the men and women of an older age that either yearn and follow God or spurn and disengage from spiritual matters provides a basis for this project. The Bible has demonstrated that the elderly do not necessarily move toward spiritual maturity as years advance. Old age may, however, warrant an opportunity to draw closer to God as physical loss and old age go hand in hand. This loss in the form of death of loved ones (Naomi, Ruth, Job) may give

⁸³ Glenn O'Brien, "John Wesley, the Uniting Church, and the Authority of Scripture." *Pacifica* 27, no. 2 (2014): 170–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1030570X14544926>.

them time to pause and consider God in a deeper and more meaningful sense. The Bible also indicates that true religion is caring for the widow and the orphan.⁸⁴ Harris writes that Jesus condemns those who shirk the care of aging parents through a religious vow called “Corban.”⁸⁵

The resident community that was the subject of this project included eight Bible verses that provide a foundation for the mission for the work that is done within their facilities. One of the verses is from Leviticus 19:32. It states, “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.” The implication of verses such as this one is that Christians should consider the elderly and meet their needs. If one were to consider the greatest need a person might have, it may be concluded that salvation is at the center. Caring for the elderly, then, must include affirming their knowledge of the gospel and their understanding of God’s salvation plan for them.

David lamented about others’ care for him as he aged and wrote, “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent.”⁸⁶ Scriptures such as this should indicate a summons to consider the spiritual needs of older adults and the possibility that they may not have understood the gospel even though it was presented to them at some point because the generation that they came from expected them to “go to church” but not necessarily “meditate on the word day and night.”⁸⁷

Theoretical Foundations

Evidence suggests that today’s elderly are doing quite well in their faith compared to the generations that follow them. For example, Barna reports that the Elder Generation (the generation

⁸⁴ James 1:27.

⁸⁵ Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 56.

⁸⁶ Psalm 71:9.

⁸⁷ Psalm 1:2.

immediately before the Baby Boomer generation) believes in greater number (31 percent) that the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally.⁸⁸ Each subsequent generation responded that they believed that imperative in fewer numbers and Millennials only accepted biblical infallibility at a 16 percent rate according to Barna. This information would suggest that the attention that Christian teaching can offer might well be used to instruct the younger generations that believe in foundational truth in fewer numbers than do the elderly.

This shift in biblical understanding coincides with an emphasis that churches have had on youth during the past thirty years, the idea being that creating opportunities for youth will attract families to the church, which in turn, will grow the church.⁸⁹ In recent decades, Vacation Bible School, mid-week youth group, short-term mission trips abroad for youth, and contemporary music that might attract youth and engage them in Sunday worship have been introduced. If the same assumptions about the generation at the top (the oldest) continued to be made, the church as a whole would believe that each and every oldest generation is stable in its biblical understanding. If that were to be true, how would they get there? The Millennials will be the oldest generation in fifty years. If they believe in the infallibility of the Bible at a 16 percent rate today, how will they move toward greater understanding? Even though they may have received what previous generations had not (i.e., youth group, mission trips, AWANA, and VBS), it did not serve to move the generation closer to a biblical worldview.

The Pew research study of 2014 did not consider the Baby Boomer generation the oldest living or only relevant oldest generation but also considered the Silent and the GI generations when asking questions about generational differences in assessing the infallibility of Scripture. The

⁸⁸ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 92.

⁸⁹ Mark Cannister, *Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 11.

responses of the GI and Silent generation representatives indicate that they had a lesser belief in the infallibility of the Bible as time went on.⁹⁰

While generational differences may lead to an understanding of how culture and practice have historically influenced Bible reading, the faith background of those that are either engaging or not engaging in the Word also offers evidence of a need for intervention. The community at the facility being studied comes from a predominantly Catholic background. Barna demonstrates that 64 percent of practicing Catholics are “Bible readers,” defined as those that read the Scriptures at least three times each year.⁹¹ This rate is 22 percent less than practicing Protestants, demonstrating that practicing Catholics engage less with the Bible than other practicing Christians. Barna grants that it is fair to say that this reduced engagement may be due to Catholics engaging “differently” in Bible understanding by hearing the Bible read aloud rather than reading it themselves.⁹²

The question for Catholic residents is if the homilies that they have received over the many years of attending mass have informed them adequately of biblical truth in the areas of assurance of salvation, in particular. Attending a mass or church service may give a resident comfort, in that they believe that they have done something to fulfill a religious requirement, which can stave off worry about an uncertain future. Krauss’ study shows that religious beliefs give people a sense that God cares for them. He continues that if people understand that God recognizes them, they will believe that God loves them and they will have optimism that will lead to a sense of direction and purpose in life.⁹³ Studies that measure religious meaning and well-being in late life are valuable to understand how one elderly person may be able to persist in relative peace during his or her last

⁹⁰ Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study,” 6.

⁹¹ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 73.

⁹² Barna, *The Bible in America*, 73.

⁹³ Krauss, “Religious Meaning,” 161.

years while others may be wrought with worry, concern and despair as they move toward their final years of life.

What Krauss does not measure, however, is the certainty with which elderly can answer the questions: What happens to you when you die? Are you certain if you died today you would go to heaven? What has informed the belief that you have? These lacunae in the study of biblical literacy within generations miss the mark as far as their utility for determining what biblical literacy could mean to an individual. For instance, knowing that Noah built the ark rather than Moses (a common error) and being able to intelligibly explain the book, chapter, and verse citation of Scripture may lead to a requisite understanding of the Bible for one person compared to another. The statistics, however, for questions like these, cannot give a good indication to which eternal home each elderly resident may belong after death.

Delivering the truth of Scripture to the elderly in the time they have left on this earth is another significant challenge. Throop suggests that the traditional methods of factual presentation and linking verses to certain themes was what would have been experienced “a generation or two ago.”⁹⁴ His supposition included the idea that Christian education programs might take into account different intelligences such as musical, bodily, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal and natural intelligences. Thus, if individuals are able to reflect their own personal gifts and strengths in the information presented, they may be more apt to continue to be engaged in it and to retain it. This research is focused on the learning aptitude of school-aged students. An understanding of the elderly and the consideration of their aptitude and its deterioration is not part of most learning and cognition studies. It may be the sentiment that someone is never “too old” to learn new concepts but the practice is lacking in education. Throop mentions the most solid universal teaching method:

⁹⁴ John Throop, “Learning Methods and Biblical Engagement,” *Clergy Journal* 84, no. 5 (2008), 16–17.

“drawing on the shared experiences of the learner.”⁹⁵ This is the platform from which to dive with the elderly that have come from varied backgrounds, have lost some abilities and capacity, yet still have a thirst prompted by the Holy Spirit to come and learn about God’s truth.

The theology of hope in salvation is at the heart of this study. It is the most personal element and of the greatest interest to the participants. One may accept that the Bible is true, and support that trusting God is necessary, but as a person is near eternity their interest shifts to life and death. Assurance of salvation is the key theological component of this study for that reason.

As a term, assurance of salvation is appropriately defined as a doctrine that “those who are truly saved may know without a doubt that they are saved.”⁹⁶ Hoskinson and Wayne Grudem contend that assurance of salvation offers hope to the true believer in Christ.⁹⁷ This biblical truth of knowing, however, can be tarnished by erroneous free grace ideas, as Grudem finds that the believer must demonstrate repentance from sin and a persistence in the faith that is evidenced by good works and a continuing to believe.⁹⁸ Free Grace Theology proponents such as Charles Bing, Robert Wilken, Fred Lybrand, and Joseph Dillow misinterpret Ephesians 2:8–9 and the phrase “by faith alone,” and do not accurately represent Reformation thinking.⁹⁹ For some outside of Protestantism, there may be confusion between understanding “free” grace that says one does not have to demonstrate repentance or good works and the Reformed view that states those two elements are very much a part of occupying a saved condition.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, 5.

⁹⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 26.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Roman view, which describes the imperceptibility of salvation as certainty to man. Aquinas, and later the Council of Trent, believed that knowing of assurance of salvation in this mortal life was virtually impossible because it was commensurate with “presuming to know the mind of God with regard to predestination.”¹⁰⁰ This view may have had the benefit of drawing more people closer to the Catholic church and demonstrating piety in light of the uncertainty of heaven. It, however, lacked the biblical foundation that faith in the work and person of Christ might give to a believer, which is hope. While this view had been a staple of the Roman Catholic Church for some time, more recent clarifications have brought Rome and Protestant theology closer. Lutherans and Catholics seeking a form of ecumenical consensus on the issue have agreed that “one can wholly rely on what God has done in Jesus Christ and every ‘subjectivistic’ certitude is excluded in light of the weakness and unreliability of human beings.”¹⁰¹ While this understanding is helpful, a consensus reached in meeting rooms does not always make it to the pulpits and pews of the congregations; and the elderly, who are not able to attend their church or mass, may miss the advancements made by denominational administrations.

Payment for sin by grace at any level is difficult for the human of the twenty-first century to grasp. Humans want to “do something” to earn that grace and many will simply be uncertain that they can do enough right to go to heaven or enough wrong to go to hell. Some advocate a “time of conversion” view to solidify their position of certainty of salvation. This view contends that saving faith is located in the mind and is a gift from God; therefore, there are no actions or good works required to substantiate its truth.¹⁰² The “present only” view would differ and contend that believers

¹⁰⁰ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Pieter de Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference : To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹⁰² Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, 198.

could lose their salvation causing the Holy Spirit to depart and thus enter into eternal torment.¹⁰³

Anthony Burgess believed that certainty of the damned was also something to be ascertained. He stated, “A man who lives in the habit of serious sins should be assured that he is presently in a damnable condition, and will be so as long as he lives that way. The works of the flesh are manifest or plainly visible, and those who live that way have no inheritance in God’s kingdom.”¹⁰⁴

The researcher provided the more balanced “composite view” to the participants learning about the assurance of salvation. This perspective argues that saving faith includes knowledge of Christ’s person and saving work, “emotional assent of the heart and the realities they signify,” and, as Grudem mentioned, commitment to Christ as evidenced by obedience and good works.¹⁰⁵ This view, when explained properly, should not deter Catholics or Protestants from receiving God’s gift of grace that is salvation. They can embrace the truth of Ephesians 2:8–9 as well as John 5:24, which states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” The strength of this view for the purpose of this project is that it can speak to the historical beliefs of both Protestants and Catholics in the study. The example that Jesus offers of grace is that of work done by Christ alone, to whom both Protestants and Catholics owe their converted lives. It is Jesus’ work which allows them to, in turn, do good works themselves. The conclusion they will leave with should be of more hope than what they came to the study demonstrating. This is (1) they can be certain of their salvation in Christ and (2) this salvation is recognizable in a converted person that persists in the faith.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Joel R. Beeke and Paul Smalley, “Assurance of Salvation: The Insights of Anthony Burgess,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 2 (2014): 171–84.

¹⁰⁵ Beeke and Smalley, “Assurance of Salvation,” 171–84.

Getting to the issue of certainty of salvation (presented in session 3) required participants to journey through confronting if they believe the Bible is true (session 1) and if they are able to trust the Word and trust the Giver of the Word (session 2), God. Although the current research has discovered a waning of interest in biblical engagement among each successive generation, there is very little specific research that suggests the current generation of elderly face greater gaps in knowledge than their predecessors. There remain even fewer studies that focus on the shared experience of elderly tying into the urgency of understanding biblical answers that were missed relating to the fear of death and being assured of a place in heaven after death. This project endeavored to open avenues for prompting the elderly to consider missed biblical truth and leading them into a process of engaging with the Bible for the remainder of their lifetimes as they gain ability to give a reason to others for their hope after death.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This project attempted to remediate the problem of elderly residents of a retirement facility lacking biblical formation that leads to uncertainty in their preparation for death and eternity. A review of the literature demonstrates that the elderly experience a reduction in physical and cognitive abilities and as such may be limited in their ability to read, complete assignments, engage in dialogue, and ask for specific help in spiritual understanding. Census data from the facility's home office indicates that the average age of residents within the facility is above that of the expected lifespan for U.S. citizens. This information impelled use of an intervention that would be brief, recognizable, and would build on itself as a reinforcement to the learning that elderly residents are to receive.

For this reason the small group dinner session was chosen as the intervention to address the problem. Residents that participate in the study were found to have a lack of biblical understanding of the issues of death, heaven, and the assurance of salvation. These issues were preached coherently in a series of three sermon messages for the entire resident facility to attend, if they chose. The participants were also encouraged to attend worship where they received an introduction to the Scripture that surrounds these issues. They then received a follow-up group lesson that went into detail about the theme of that week. After the sermon series and follow-up activities were completed, the residents articulated a greater knowledge of the biblical truth related to death and eternity and gave specific reasons for their comfort when facing both.

Intervention Design

Purpose and Objective

The intervention used was contemplated and prayed for to address the problem stated in the thesis. The intervention addressed one of three spiritual deficits that the elderly faced that led to uncertainty and distress at the end of life. These three “gaps” were identified as biblical illiteracy, either a misunderstanding of biblical truth or a lack or limited history in reading or being taught the true word of God, and a curbed sense of inquiry about the contents of the Word.¹⁰⁶ Some people find futility in the Bible’s manner of speech and lack of details in the characters; therefore, they refuse its study.¹⁰⁷

The second area may be best termed as a gap in the trust that a person needs to have in God. This may be displayed by a lack of understanding of who God is, how he has established His will in the purpose of people’s lives, or simply feeling at a distance from God or an unapproachability toward God. For older adults, an understanding of the pain that a long life brings may prompt the question, “Can you really trust God when adversity strikes and fills your life with pain?”¹⁰⁸ Peter Enns describes these questions as “uh-oh moments” when certainty gives way to uncertainty.¹⁰⁹

Finally, the third area is built on the previous two. If there is limited biblical understanding or a misinterpretation of God, there may be a faulty conclusion as to what might occur after death.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Driesbach, *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2015), 36.

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Beal, *Biblical Literacy: The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2016), 3

¹⁰⁹ Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our “Correct” Beliefs* (New York HarperOne, 2016), 8.

Individuals that are only moderately religious fear death the most.¹¹⁰ If elderly individuals do not full understanding salvation from the Bible and the heart of God, they may not know of His plan for eternity for them. The discussion of fear of death included hell, but it was not given equal time in relation to understanding salvation. The disbelief of hell is reported by 17 percent of practicing Protestants and 25 percent of Catholics.¹¹¹ This can lead to great distress as the elderly residents face death in the next three to seven years.

Forty-two percent of the residents at the facility chosen for this study identified as “Catholic” upon entry into the facility.¹¹² Personal conversations with five Catholic residents revealed the concern over the issue of uncertainty at death and fear of death. Other residents including those that identified with a Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican background stated that they “do not know the Bible.” The Bible study and the morning devotional had twenty-two individuals collectively which elicited the following comments: “I don’t understand the chapter and verse and how to find a passage in the Bible”; “I always thought (the Bible) was just a collection of stories”; “I never understood the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament”; and “I don’t know if I am going to heaven, but I hope I’ve done enough to get in.” In these cases and many others, what is currently true is that the elderly residence has a very high percentage of persons that self-identify that they do not know much about what is contained in the Bible. This problem with biblical illiteracy and especially with the uncertainty of salvation is exacerbated by the data that shows they will live in a resident facility for an average of seven years.

¹¹⁰ P. Wink and J. Scott, “Does Religiousness Buffer against the Fear of Death and Dying in Late Adulthood? Findings from a Longitudinal Study,” *Journals of Gerontology* 60, no. 4 (2005): 207–14.

¹¹¹ Stephen Cranney et al., “Hell Anxiety as Non-pathological Fear,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture: Special Issue: Assessment of Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 21, no. 9–10 (2018): 867–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2018.1443436>.

¹¹² Religions List: Independent, Assisted and Memory Care, Presbyterian Homes and Services, Region 4, accessed May 16, 2019.

During a gathering of forty-two campus pastors from among collaborating elderly residence facilities, a consensus among the group of pastors revealed that there was a general lack of biblical literacy among the residents in the facilities they serve. A deeper discussion indicated that possible results from that include apprehension and anxiety before death, uncertainty of salvation, and deeper grief among surviving family members upon the death of the resident. That meeting triggered more discussion between the site leader and the campus pastor, who agreed to develop the project to address the problem. The intervention included an assessment that would inform as to the basic understanding of scriptural elements and the fear of death and understanding of biblical salvation. The assessment information gathering was held and the assessments were handed out to each resident that attended. Upon completion of the assessment, it was determined which residents would be invited to participate in the next phase, a three-session dinner lesson time on the subjects of certainty of the Bible, trusting God, and assurance of salvation. All residents received an invitation to a six-sermon series that addressed the three issues above. The discrepancies in the faith of the residents revealed during the initial questionnaire were addressed with the sermon and the corresponding follow-up session. Those participating in the three-session dinner segments were given an identical assessment to determine if their view on the Bible, fear of death or salvation changed as a result of the teaching on the matters.

Decision to Exclude Certain Residents

The project was introduced to all residents during a forty-five-minute Sunday evening session on February 16, 2020, with a dessert buffet for those who attended. The purpose and the plan for addressing spiritual gaps was explained to those attending. The information session was intended for the entire community of assisted and independent living residents. Eighteen residents were excluded from the initial meeting. These residents have Alzheimer's disease or other forms of

dementia and were assessed not to have the capability to participate in the study by the Nursing Supervisor. These residents received a targeted weekly sermon message that addressed the same topics included in the study.

The Tasks to Be Done and Related Details

1. Determination of the Intervention for the Project

The roadmap for this project began as a journey to address the most critical spiritual need for the elderly in resident facilities. Coetaneously, biblical illiteracy as determined by a group of campus pastors that serve elderly residences had been mentioned during regional meetings of campus site pastors. They were concerned that because elderly residents are lacking in biblical understanding, they are in danger of an incomplete or erroneous grasp of God's salvation.

Steps Taken

During a May 2019 summit meeting of all campus pastors for elderly residences, the problem of biblical literacy was officially posed to the group for consideration. This meeting led the investigator to intentional but informal discussion with residents at the particular facility in which the participants now reside. During three months of informal investigation, a determination was made that, indeed, senior adults have a lack of biblical understanding, especially those from a Catholic background. Individuals with whom this researcher spoke had a general sentiment that they were not encouraged to read the Bible and that they had a limited understanding of it. Other Protestant residents, however, suggested that they, too, had not spent much time personally reading the Word, but they also intimated that they were uncertain about God's character as revealed by the following statements made:

- "How can God send so many people to Hell? I though He loved everybody."
- "I cannot accept that the Jews go to Hell, they are God's chosen people."

- “I do not pray that often because God has many other people that need His attention before me.”
- “I have done some things that I am not proud of; I am not ready to go to heaven yet because I could not look at God know what I have done.”

Still, other residents offered great disparity in their thinking about heaven and their prospect of being with God there after their death. These comments seemed to come from Catholics, Protestants, and others as noted:

- “I mean no one can really know if they are going to heaven, right? I’d like to go, but I can’t say for sure.” (Catholic man)
- “I am going to heaven, I think. I have to see my husband who is in heaven, I think.”
(Catholic woman)
- “It is one of God’s mysteries, heaven. Only God knows who gets in.” (Catholic woman)
- “I spend as little time as possible thinking about such things. I don’t ‘do’ religion.” (Jewish man)
- “I am afraid of what God would think of me. I don’t like to think about it because I am scared.” (Protestant woman)

These informal interview responses were recorded and considered over the summer of 2019 and were utilized to construct the purpose of the project, which addressed the residents’ trust in God and fear of death alongside the paucity of biblical understanding, as these themes emerged during conversations with residents. Once the threefold intervention was decided, the next task was to enlist corporate prayer.

People Involved

The initial prompt for the project came from a group of forty-eight campus pastors working within the same organization but serving at campuses in three different states. The pastors came from a wide range of Christian backgrounds including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Evangelical Free Church, Christian Reformed Church, and nondenominational. The Director of Spiritual Formation, a Lutheran man, oversees the work of the men and women that serve as campus pastors within the elderly residences.

Venue for the Activity

The campus pastors meet monthly at the corporate location in Minnesota. They can, and often do, meet regionally with other pastors to discuss the common spiritual issues with residents of that region.

Timelines

The convocation of campus pastors occurred in May of 2019 and prompted a three-month period for the investigator to question and gather insight from residents as to their potential spiritual issues during the months of June through August 2019.

Tools Needed

The investigator took notes either during or after conversations with residents and compiled those notes to determine the potential direction for the project.

2. Prayer Support from Residents in the Campus Bible Study

Prayer occupied the foundational piece of the project from its conception through selection of residents to participate, implementation of the intervention, and the eventual results of the intervention. The investigator requested that the prayer group serve as the thread that would begin and conclude the project.

Steps Taken

The investigator posed the question of prayer during a late December 2019 Bible study and revisited the question when the study resumed in mid-January. The group requested that the pastor give them specific items to pray for each week and then someone would lead a prayer for the project the next week until the project would be concluded.

People Involved

One man and eight women agreed to pray for the project at each stage of its development. The group was made of residents of the facility and ranged in age from sixty-five years to ninety-two years old. As more entered the Bible study, they were informed of the project and invited to pray for it as well.

Venue for the Activity

The prayer and Bible study were held in a semi-private activity room on the third floor of the resident building. It was reserved for this activity.

Timelines

The weekly prayer occupied about five minutes of the Bible study time and the prayer for the project began on January 16, 2020, and continued through the defense of the paper, albeit individually rather than collectively.

Tools Needed

The group requested verbal updates on the planning and progress of the study each week.

3. Approval and Support from Facility Administration

The safety of the residents is best known by the site administrator of each resident facility. The project could not progress without the backing of the regional administrator and the specific

site administrator in which the project was implemented. In addition to the facility, the investigator proposed that the site consider supporting dinners for three evenings during which the intervention took place. This was done to ensure more consistent participation and the availability of most participants.

Steps Taken

Verbal approval was requested of the Regional Director in November 2019 when it became evident that the project would best be suited for a campus under her supervision. The written request was sent on December 9, 2019, to the Regional Director and also to the local Site Supervisor for approval. The next day, the administrators requested a proposal or draft. The draft was sent on December 10 after which approval was granted on December 13, 2019.

People Involved

The group that was given the draft included the site supervisor, the regional director, the director of spiritual formation, and the corporate counsel attorney.

Venue for the Activity

Apart from the initial verbal query, the approval request and the resulting approval were given online.

Timelines

The verbal request was posed in November 2019 and by December 13 the investigator received the approval needed to secure the location for the study.

Tools Needed

The draft copy of the paper was requested along with the proposed time the study would be in effect (February through March).

4. Determining the Best Method to Reach the Elderly in the Three Key Areas

The skill and interest of the investigator is teaching. These pillars provided the initial query as to how address the spiritual challenges elderly residents face. The trusted residents that attended spiritual formation activities were questioned to determine a direction for the type of intervention that would be used.

Steps Taken

Tying the three subjects together was inspired by Gary Millar's book, *Need to Know: Your Guide to the Christian Life*. In his book, Millar used the personal analogy of "being exposed" or found out by authorities that were able to determine that he was driving in excess of the speed limit.¹¹³ Debunking and demystifying the Bible, the truth of God, and the question of death and life after death became a puzzle that needed to be solved in short order. The original plan called for six teaching sessions with two each for the Bible, trust in God, and salvation. When it became apparent that there was a limit to funding the dinners for the participants and a question about their participation in six sessions, it was consolidated into three sessions with one for each of the topics.

Originally, in deciding which topic to build upon, "trust in God" was to be first. However, in the reading of Barna's landscape study of the Bible, it became apparent that having the participants look at others' perceptions such as 45 percent of elderly adults not knowing that "3" in John 3:16 stands for "chapter," would be a better strategy to welcome them into the study and allow them to feel the safety in numbers of having spiritual gaps.¹¹⁴ It also made sense to keep a continuity and reference easy to follow in that the first questions on the questionnaire related to the Bible, the middle questions to trust in God, and the last questions referring to death and salvation. The issue of

¹¹³ Gary Millar, *Need to Know: Your Guide to the Christian Life* (Surrey, UK: The Good Book Co., 2011), 46.

¹¹⁴ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 50.

assurance of salvation was reserved for the last lesson as it would build from the two previous teaching sessions.

People Involved

The investigator consulted a group of four regionally known pastors to confirm the issues and sequencing of the teaching.

Venue for the Activity

In office conversations and additional conversations were held via telephone with pastors.

Timelines

The outlines for the sessions were begun in October 2019 and continued to be updated until their submission to the IRB in December 2019.

Tools Needed

Texts from Barna, Gilbert, Sweeting, Grudem, and Millar proved to be valuable during the construction of the initial outlines.

5. Development of an Initial Questionnaire

An assumption was made that the instrument should be brief, easy to understand, and one that would not offend the group of residents asked to complete it. The questionnaire was the essential instrument in determining change after the intervention was made as it was re-issued following the teaching lessons to uncover any changes that the residents realized.

Steps Taken

Informal discussions with residents clearly indicated that any survey or questionnaire should be brief and no longer than one page. The residents had routinely completed surveys for the

administration of the facility since they were the inaugural residents in a building that was only one year old.

The questions of the name of the Bible's first book and the identification of the "3" in John 3:16 may have seemed rudimentary for evangelical Christians but they had proven anything but during the screening from the pilot group. It was determined that those questions would be sufficient to gauge the kind of biblical knowledge that the study would call for. Explaining the core truths of the gospel though trusting God was determined by asking questions rooted in the message of the gospel itself. These questions were aimed to illustrate whether the respondent trusted totally in Jesus or if there was an element of tradition or self-worth built into salvation.¹¹⁵ The final questions were chosen by the investigator as the core questions for this particular group. The campus pastor's understanding of elderly residents' fear of death and uncertainty of their salvation was crucial in determining the starting point and addressing individual needs as well as corporate deficits.

People Involved

The campus pastor formulated the questions and sent them to the regional director and site director for review and feedback.

Venue for the activity

The work and development on the instrument took place at the facility, online, and at the local community library.

Timelines

Work began on developing the questionnaire on September 12, 2019. It was completed as a

¹¹⁵ Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), 34.

draft by October 24 with October 31 the date set for receiving feedback by a group of residents within the facility.

6. Invitation to Resident Group to Review the Proposed Questionnaire

The members of the site's Bible study and a few of their spouses made up an eleven-member group that was asked to review a draft of the questionnaire and offer suggestions or changes to the document. Specifically, they considered any offensive language or questions and if the document addressed the purpose and objectives of the project, which was explained to them. This group understood that they would not be invited to participate in the second phase of the study, which was to be the small group teaching sessions.

Steps Taken

The Bible study was informed on October 17, 2019, that they would be invited to participate in a review of the questionnaire for the study. This informal gathering was to be a short discussion among the group and one spouse that wished to give some initial feedback for the document. The group requested and was granted the opportunity to review the document one week before the meeting. A reminder was placed in their internal mailbox on October 24 with a copy of the drafted questionnaire and eleven persons came for the discussion on October 31 for a review that lasted for forty-five minutes.

People Involved

Eleven residents of which nine women and two men were in attendance for the October 31 meeting.

Venue for the Activity

The third-floor activity room which has been used as a site for Bible study was used for the meeting. The residents were familiar with the space and had elevator access to get to the room. The room was closed for privacy for this discussion.

Timelines

The September 12 formation and October 24 distribution was sufficient to receive the feedback needed to include with the proposal.

Tools Needed

The investigator provided coffee and cheesecake for the 3:00 p.m. meeting on October 31 as was offered on the October 24 reminder to participate.

7. Engaging and Informing the Community through an Information Session

The distribution of the questionnaire and the explanation of the project occurred through a sitewide information session. During the session residents heard the purpose and objectives of the project and then were asked to complete the questionnaire. Those determined to have gaps in their spiritual lives relating to the three areas addressed by the instrument were asked to participate in phase 2 of the project.

Steps Taken

A letter to the campus was written and, along with the questionnaire, was distributed to 108 residents of the facility on February 1, 2019. This letter explained the project and included the date of the gathering. The residents received a reminder for the event on February 13.

People Involved

The investigator, his wife, and three culinary food service employees were needed for the event.

Venue for the Activity

The event was held in the Community Room on the facility's first floor. It was the largest gathering room and had the capability for video projection.

Timelines

The information event was set for Sunday, February 16, at 6:30 p.m. in order to not conflict with other events at the residence. Information from the results of the questionnaire were compiled and a group of residents were invited to the second phase of the project, "Food for Thought," on Monday, February 24, at 4:30 p.m.

Tools Needed

The event required a projector, sound system, a microphone for the presenter, and a PowerPoint presentation to help illustrate the details of the project. In order to encourage participation and attendance, a dessert buffet was provided and door prizes were offered to selected residents.

8. Selection of Phase 2 Participants

It was anticipated that 30 of the 108 residents would come to the information session. The information session served as a recruitment venue for the in-depth "Food for Thought" teaching sessions that would see twelve participants through a series of spiritual lessons.

Steps Taken

The second phase teaching and dinner intervention were limited to no more than twelve participants due to space and funding limitations to provide a venue for a small group that was private where dinner could be served. Therefore, those with the most significant gaps were chosen first and others were chosen based on spiritual urgency. If there were some residents that had no spiritual gaps, they would be allowed to participate in the teaching sessions only after those with determined needs were offered the opportunity.

The goal was to fill the twelve spots, but with those lacking certainty of salvation or having a fear of death being chosen first. The questionnaire was scored based on a point system that weighted the fear of death and uncertainty of salvation highest. Other questions answered incorrectly or not answered were noted accordingly. The questionnaires were tabulated and the residents selected based on their scores. For the teaching to be effective, it was anticipated that 75 percent or more of those chosen would have one or more spiritual gap in the area of biblical illiteracy, trust in God, or fear of death/uncertainty of salvation. Invitations to participate in the second phase were hand delivered and explained to each resident selected. The teaching sessions began promptly one week following the information session to maintain a current status with the residents.

People Involved

Twenty-nine residents attended the information session and twelve individuals were selected to enter the second phase of the project. The head chef was alerted to the actual number of participants and prepared the private dining area for the small group.

Venue for the Activity

The selection of the group participants and their invitation to the second phase took place at the facility. The elderly residents selected received an invitation hand delivered by the investigator with an explanation of the request to continue their participation with three dinner meetings and an individual follow-up.

Timelines

The investigator utilized two days to compile the results of the questionnaires from the group meeting. The invitations were prepared on the third day and all invitations hand delivered on day four with four days left before beginning the first learning session. The head chef was told the final count four days before the dinner, which was sufficient to prepare the table for the group.

Tools Needed

This step required the space to spread out the sheets and compare them against one another.

9. Construction of a Teaching Intervention

The collection of feedback from residents led to the construction of a teaching plan for the three areas of need for elderly residents. Residents were invited to participate regardless of their religious affiliation and the only limitation placed on them was that those suffering from dementia would be excluded from the study. Of those attending the initial information session, the most urgent residents lacking in one or more of the spiritual benchmarks were invited to participate in a series of small group sessions to dispel misinformation and to present them with truth so that they might be better informed and also more apt to come forward in the future and ask questions related to the most urgent spiritual concerns they face. These sessions were dinner teaching sessions called “Food for Thought.”

Steps Taken

The chef and culinary personnel suggested that the residents normally take a full hour to eat dinner, so this would allow for an extended time of teaching each topic. Since the majority of residents must pay for their meals, the incentive to receive a free dinner was established to increase the interest and continued participation in the small group. The organization, fully supporting the project, agreed to pay the cost of the meals for the residents and the investigator for the three weeks. The number of residents participating in “Food for Thought” was limited to twelve due to space limitations in the private dining room. Using the information collected from previous conversations with residents, a forty-five-minute teaching session was provided with fifteen minutes for discussion at the end of the session for questions that would arise. It was anticipated and theorized that the residents would increase their number of questions with each session due to their familiarity with the process, their comfort with one another, and their increased confidence in understanding what was being taught and the reinforcement of what they had already learned.

People Involved

People involved in this step included the twelve participants, the researcher, and the team of waitstaff and chef for the evening.

Venue for the Activity

During each dinner, the residents were seated at a common long table in a manner that would allow them to view a sixty-inch television monitor in a private dining area. The wait service team asked them to choose between two entrees that evening and the residents and waitstaff then were asked to bow for a table prayer for the meal and the session. This kind of public prayer is not common practice for the residents and set the tone for the session as well. One participant was selected to take notes of all questions during and following the session.

Timelines

The three sessions were taught on consecutive Monday evenings beginning at 4:30 p.m., which was the most popular time for beginning dinner. The sessions generally concluded by 5:30 p.m. Each session began on time and most ended on time, but there was time for those wishing to ask additional questions to linger after dinner was completed.

Tools Needed

The sessions were limited in their written information; instead, a PowerPoint presentation and amplified sound system was utilized so that there was no difficulty in hearing the presentation or teaching. The investigator created and utilized an outline that was formulated from the questionnaire to address the three topics.

The certainty of heaven was the most difficult to craft as far as the teaching, but for the questionnaire, the statements were kept intentionally straightforward: “I fear death” and “I am certain that I am going to heaven after I die” were the indicators for that section. The spirit of persistence as saints was given during the teaching session much as Grudem defined it in *Christian Beliefs*.¹¹⁶ The sessions included the three key spiritual elements and related PowerPoint presentations for each:

Session 1: Is the Bible True? This first teaching session related to questions 2, 3 and 4 of the Questionnaire. Those answering these questions incorrectly were at the meeting based on their misunderstanding of rather basic truth from the Bible. Barna’s research on biblical understanding provided the basis for the inclusion of these three questions.¹¹⁷ The session addressed the misconceptions with the Bible as well as the basis for the Bible and its purpose for those claiming

¹¹⁶ Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 104.

¹¹⁷ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 102.

to be Christians. The Bible was represented as true and dangerous in that it teaches absolutes for the important issue of salvation.¹¹⁸ The scriptures illustrating the importance and function of the Bible were Acts 20:26–27, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and 2 Peter 1:20–21. Science, prophecies, and archaeology were also cemented to the idea that unless the truth of the Bible is presupposed, nothing can be accepted.¹¹⁹ This first dinner session reinforced the goals of the three sessions and participants were encouraged to attend all three sessions and the individual follow-up appointment. A PowerPoint presentation was shown to keep the participants engaged and anticipating what was coming next. They received the PowerPoint notes if they wished to refer to the presentation or take any notes. Since some members of the group had visual impairments, it was not required that they write anything or take any notes. In addition, discussion of fulfilled prophecy of the Bible and the importance of the four gospel accounts was discussed in the forty-five-minute session. To demonstrate engagement, the participants were encouraged to ask questions but not required to do so. This element was traced and reported as a result at the end of the project.

Session 2: Can I Trust God? Week 2 built on the first week’s teaching. There was prayer to begin the session and a recapping of the prior week’s teaching in the first PowerPoint slide. This session could have been offered first as it is difficult to differentiate God and His Word as far as which topic to begin with and build on for the next. The Bible was selected as the building block for trusting in God as it was perceived as easier to lay a foundation for the Bible since all were familiar with the Bible, although many in the group had not read it extensively. Trust in God was the factor that most of the group had affirmed on the initial questionnaire. It is routinely what campus pastors

¹¹⁸ Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, *How Do We Know the Bible Is True?* Vol. 2 (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 8.

¹¹⁹ Ken Ham and Bodie Hodge, *How Do We Know the Bible is True?* Vol. 1 (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing, 2011).

find that elderly at senior residences believe. They can trust that God exists but may lack fundamental knowledge as to what God has done and what His plans for them are specifically.

This session described trust in God by utilizing two elements: His Kingdom and His plan for individuals. The approach in explaining trust in God began by posing the question, “Do people trust other people today?” A survey from *Psychology Today* was referenced that determined 71 percent of people are less trusting of others than they were twenty years ago.¹²⁰ This led to a prepared question asking the group if they believed that humanity was basically trustworthy or not. The reasons for trusting others and the characteristics of trust were simply given as integrity, honesty, intent, transparency, and consistency. Since the evidence seemed to indicate an erosion of trust, individuals do not trust in trust itself, but rather in the trustworthiness of the individual that they must rely upon.¹²¹ The group was then given scriptures that support the faithfulness of God (Exodus 34:6; Mark 10:18; Psalm 145:9) and the trust that individuals may have in God for their past, present, and future (Jeremiah 1:5; 1 John 3:20; Romans 6:23). The participants were challenged to consider trust in God differently, in that the goal or ultimate value of trusting God was in the fellowship with God Himself.¹²²

It was anticipated that invitation reminders and word of mouth along with the interest to continue the process would prompt group attendance to include all participants for week 2 of the project. As the group was encouraged to ask questions, the anticipation was that more questions would be received at the conclusion of week 2 than were offered at the conclusion of week 1.

¹²⁰ Robert Leahy, “The Decline of Trust: Why Are We Losing Confidence in Each Other?” *Psychology Today*, October 18, 2016, 52.

¹²¹ Pamela Hieronymi, “The Reasons of Trust,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 2 (2008): 213–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400801886496>.

¹²² Sheela Pawar, *Trusting Others, Trusting God : Concepts of Belief, Faith and Rationality* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016).

Furthermore, the goal was to have an increasingly diverse set of group members asking questions as a hint of the engagement of the entire group.

Session 3: Can I Be Certain That I Am Going to Heaven? The final teaching session was built upon the previous two. A summation of the previous session was given to the group, and they were prepared to take the questionnaire a second time upon conclusion of the evening's lesson. The third session had the most potential for discussion and disagreement from other denominational perspectives. Arguments from Scripture as to God's intention and actions to save sinners through the gift of grace were presented to the group.

The commonly misunderstood perceptions that one can be good enough to get to heaven and no one can possibly know for certain one's destiny after death were examined. Time limitations and denominational differences prevented additional discussions such as annihilation, rapture theories, and the exact reign of Christ on earth. Rather, the explanation of the certainty of heaven by a believer was threaded through the knowledge that the judgement is done by the crucified One.¹²³

Session 3 considered the final two questions asked on the questionnaire that relate to a fear of death and a possible uncertainty of heaven after death. These questions were the culmination of the project and addressed a perceived fear of death and uncertainty of salvation among elderly residents at the facility. The illustration from Andy Stanley's book, *How Good is Good Enough* ("God and the Good College Professor")¹²⁴, provided an exchange of ideas that helped to determine what the group had surmised from the Bible, the good nature of God, and the connection that made with the assurance of salvation.

¹²³ Mark Stenberg, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Joel Hodgson, *51% Christian: Finding Faith after Certainty*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2015), 139, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155j3kn>.

¹²⁴ Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough*, 32.

The small group participants were thanked for their participation and received an appointment card for the final follow-up consultation. They were given the opportunity to choose the location of the meeting that would last about 30 minutes.

10. Securing the Participation of the Residents

The reinforcement of the sessions needed to be a continual process of repeated reminders in the form of invitations to the residents so that they would not forget or overlook the session. This feedback came from the pilot group and was used to secure the participation of the twelve residents throughout the three weeks and beyond.

Steps Taken

Participants received a reminder card in their mail cubby the Thursday before the dinner was to be held. They were again reminded of the dinner each Monday morning at breakfast as the campus pastor greeted them for the day.

People Involved

The investigator made the reminder cards and placed them in the mailboxes.

Venue for the Activity

Within the facility, the residents received the reminder card and a personal reminder before each dinner session. The reminders were always consistent: a reminder card delivered Thursday and a verbal reminder before noon on the Monday of each dinner.

Timelines

A total of five weeks were set aside for the activity. The “Food for Thought” sessions lasted three consecutive weeks and the follow-up was allocated two weeks.

Tools Needed

A large television on a cart, a portable sound amplifying system, notes pages from each PowerPoint, and instructor's notes were required for the sessions.

11. Follow-up Appointments with Participants

Beyond the findings of the questionnaire, the follow-up interview was given to the participants as an opportunity to clarify what was learned and also to ascertain if they had received Christ at the conclusion of the third session when the offer was given to do so. The individual and private appointment also gave residents the liberty to clarify what was learned or what elements were unclear to them without being embarrassed to speak in front of others.

Steps Taken

The follow-up sessions were scheduled to be completed the week after the last teaching session. At the final learning session, residents were given a schedule to confirm a time for them to attend the follow-up meeting. The investigator adjusted any assigned times before anyone left the dinner table.

People Involved

The twelve residents and the investigator participated in this step of the project.

Venue for the Activity

The residents chose the location for this part of the project. They were given the choice of the campus pastor's office, their apartment, or the private dining area.

Timelines

The investigator used three separate days over a two-week period to complete interviews for the twelve participants.

Tools Needed

The sign-up sheet and a note pad were required for this phase. There was no electronic recording of residents or their responses for any part of the project.

Ethical Issues Related to Informed Consent and Confidentiality

The elderly over sixty-five years of age do not occupy a protected status as far as additional precautions to be considered by the researcher as subjects of a study. They, however, have certain health problems and memory problems that make them more vulnerable than their younger counterparts.¹²⁵ There is a research dilemma for the Christian researcher in that a “dullness” or lack of response among a group of elderly subjects may find as its source many factors such as medication taken for the day, sleeplessness, memory loss, undiagnosed Alzheimer’s disease, or other factors. During conversations with the campus pastor at the facility, elderly residents confided that they enjoyed activities such as Bible study, hymn singing, and corporate worship but they had trouble “hanging in there,” “forgot that the event was being held,” and were “too tired to participate” once they arrived.

The ethical issue of note is that even though the residents are classified as “independent living” or “assisted living” and not part of the facility’s memory care unit, it is difficult to determine each individual’s capacity to provide informed consent as the law presumes adults are competent unless a court deems them unfit.¹²⁶ The capacity for the memory care unit at the elderly facility is eighteen persons, and there is a waiting list for those spots. It is possible, even likely, that some residents living in assisted living or in independent living had undetected or early onset Alzheimer’s disease and attended the group information session. Some of these individuals attended the

¹²⁵ D. M. High and M. M. Doole, “Ethical and Legal Issues in Conducting Research Involving Elderly Subjects,” *Behavioral Sciences & The Law* 13, no. 3 (1995): 319–35.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

information session and received help completing the required forms. A consultation with the site supervisor determined if they should continue to phase 2, if they had determined to do so; however, no intervention was necessary for those that participated.

The researcher received approval from the regional administrator and the site supervisor to proceed with the project on one of the campuses. After several discussions and submission of a draft proposal, the regional director responded on January 12, 2020, via email that the project was endorsed and could begin at the chosen site (see Appendix C). After the researcher received IRB approval on January 30, 2020 (Appendix J), the process of compiling the consent and the questionnaire instrument was set in motion. Discussion with the site supervisor confirmed the best plan was to give the participants the consent at the time of the general information meeting. Most residents did not use email and some had trouble reading the smaller print that would be contained in the letter; therefore, it was decided to read and explain the letter of consent to them at the informational meeting held on February 16, 2020.

The largest meeting area was chosen for the informational meeting, and participants were dispersed to allow space between them to protect their answers and identity. It was necessary for participants to use their name on the questionnaire initially, which was, that evening, transferred as a number to identify the participants for phase 2. It was explained to the participants that the data would be stored on the researcher's computer that was password protected. This password was also changed weekly to ensure safety. The computer, they were assured, was either locked in the researcher's office or present with the researcher. All questionnaires and forms were securely locked in the researcher's office, to which he alone had access.

It was anticipated that some residents would not complete the forms themselves; at this point in their lives, some were used to having a family member or a guardian look over a form or

help them complete it. It was expressed to the potential participants that, if this was the case, they could take the form to their family member and get their consent or contact the researcher for a more detailed explanation before they committed to the study.

The Types of Data Collected

Two objectives drove the data collection. The participants completed an initial questionnaire that measured their biblical knowledge, understanding of God's role in salvation, and their personal understanding of salvation. After teaching interventions, a review of the previous week's lesson, and encouragement to understand these elements, the participants received the same instrument after three weeks to determine if there was any change in understanding. There was an individual follow-up evaluation for each participant that was intended to solidify the results and determine if any error was made in their completing the questionnaires. The interview determined their status. For instance, if the participant had the same answers but revealed an interest in learning more, he or she would be categorized "no change- positive." If the participant had demonstrated growth in one area, that area would be highlighted as "plus Bible" or "plus Bible and salvation."

The other element tested was engagement in the group study itself. This was done by tracking the number of questions asked and which individuals asked questions during the sessions. The expectancy was that the number of questions asked would increase from week to week and the number of participants asking questions would likewise increase. There would also be some kind of verbal affirmation of continuing the process of study revealed in the follow-up interviews.

Protocols for Tools

It is advised to have a participant or outside observer write the questions or note them for the investigator. The preference for this study was to have a participant record the "Food for Thought" sessions so that none of the questions were missed; however, if the elderly residents unanimously

comply with a recording device, it is the better choice for future studies as long as the group is not apprehensive because a recording device is present.

The researcher was prepared to investigate any missing participants for each session. It was assumed that even with a reminder the day of the dinner, some residents would forget that the event was scheduled. For this reason, a meeting space should be very near to the residences so if the investigator needs to retrieve a participant, he can do so without much disruption in the program. The meal provided time for adjusting and pausing. For instance, when the residents ordered the meal at the table for this study, the investigator was silent or played music. Before ordering, the investigator asked the waitstaff to pause until he had completed a review of the previous week and instructions for the current week. This took only five minutes but set the tone for what was to come and gave a reminder that they were present for more than just a meal. Before the food arrived, the investigator provided a question to ponder or had a transition planned for the time it took all twelve to be served.

Although the private dining room allowed for hearing the speaker's voice, a microphone and a speaker system were utilized in case participants had trouble hearing. The researcher reinforced that the information and especially the questions asked by the participants should remain confidential and not be shared with the other residents of the facility. This announcement served to put the group at ease so that they could interact normally and engage in conversation.

The participant observer was instructed to write down the questions that were asked by the residents and to note who asked each question. This person was familiar with the group members and also adhered to strict standards of privacy. A participant was preferred because an outside observer may have curb the conversation or number of questions asked if the group was uncomfortable with a nonparticipant in that role.

It was important that time be kept and that the sessions began and ended as stated. However, the researcher encouraged discussion after the sessions concluded with the group understanding that the official time and obligation were complete. After any interaction with participants, the investigator set aside an additional forty-five minutes to log impressions of the evening and make notes of any changes needed for the next session.

The Analysis/Evaluation Procedures and Methods

The initial group information session consisted of a packet at each place setting that included a consent agreement and a questionnaire. Both forms had a space for the name of the participant. The forms also had a reference number on each sheet to be used in place of their name. The reference number was used in subsequent information such as the second questionnaire, where the name was eliminated.

The questionnaire was evaluated by correct or affirmative responses scoring a “0” and other responses scored accordingly. The scoring for each of the eight items was as follows:

1. I believe that God guided the entire process of the writing of Scripture (the Bible).

Yes = 0 No = 2 Unsure = 1

2. What is the name of the first book of the Bible?

Genesis = 0 Other Bible book = 1 Other response or no response = 2

3. When we say “John 3:16,” what does the “3” refer to?

Chapter = 0 Verse = 1 Other or no response = 2

4. Circle phrase that comes directly from the Bible.

The truth will set you free = 0

To thine own self be true = 1

God helps those who help themselves = 1

5. I believe that the Bible's description of Jesus as God, that he sacrificed his life on the cross for the sins of all people, and all the miracles attributed to him were true.

Yes = 0 No = 2 Uncertain = 1

6. Circle the phrase that answers how someone gets to heaven.

If you are good enough... = 2

No one can know for certain = 1

Confess and believe that Jesus is my Savior... = 0

7. I fear death

Yes = 10 No = 0 Uncertain = 5

8. I am going to heaven after I die.

Yes = 0 No = 10 Uncertain = 5

The document was scored leaving those with the most points accumulated as the first invitees with others to follow. The final two questions were given a greater point total as they were the pivotal questions addressed in the study. This questionnaire was again given during the last "Food for Thought" session, which marked four weeks since the participants had seen the document. They completed it, and it was scored exactly the same and individual results were compared.

The Recruitment Process for Seniors in the Study

Baby Boomers and those from the previous generation can be a bit more cautious about revealing their faith background and interests.¹²⁷ The recruitment process was based on the investigator, from Generation X, utilizing strategies to recruit elderly residents from the Silent Generation (1925–1944) and the Baby Boomer Generation (1944–1964). To mitigate any distrust

¹²⁷ Jessica Chase, "The Religious Beliefs and Behaviors of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials: Are There Still Gender Differences?" (PhD diss., University of Central Florida, 2016).

between the recruits and the researcher, two of the participants were selected to help recruit participation from the community and then continue to encourage members to attend the learning sessions.

Implementation of the Intervention

The project began with the establishment of a prayer team that was comprised of the Spiritual Life Committee of the site being studied. This group was enlisted to pray for the persistence of the participants and also for any shortfalls in the project as well as any unforeseen trouble or obstacles.

It was deemed possible, even likely, that not all participants would complete the project due to unexpected health complications, which are common to the community. In the event that this had happened, the results would have been reported as such and no new participants would have been recruited to fill the vacated position. This study was planned to be continuous. New residents that enter the facility had the opportunity to participate in a rotating and expanded six-week small group study that included all of the elements of the initial project. These residents had the option to enroll at the start or midway through the study.

Placing biblical illiteracy in the midst of key questions of fear of death and assurance of salvation provided an acceptable forum to discuss difficult topics for those participating fully and also among the curious in the community. The entire community was able to understand the issues of the Bible more clearly and look forward to learning how one builds on the other, whether they were part of the small group or attended the six sermons on the subjects. The residents chosen for the study who feared death and had uncertain assurance of salvation were given group and personal attention as they considered these issues intently during this process. This intervention among this group and future groups of people can have eternal implications for those who might never have

considered these questions before the study. Ultimately, the intervention was intended to give participants an understanding of the infallibility of Scripture, the certainty of salvation for those who know Christ, and the impetus for residents to begin a daily time reading God's Word after this project was completed.

Processes

The researcher kept notes of the process outcomes after each segment of the project. This included recruitment and planning efforts, the initial meeting for all residents, the planning of "Food for Thought" teaching sessions, the sessions themselves, the follow-up visits, as well as informal conversations and feedback from the participants. These observations were contrasted with the following expectations held by the researcher at the beginning of the study:

- 30 of the 108 residents will attend the information session.
- Of those attending, ten will prove to be candidates for the next phase of the project.
- Participants in the second phase will persist at an 85 percent attendance rate and will cite illness, doctor or hospital stay, or family event/emergency as reasons for not attending all sessions.
- The number of questions asked during the three sessions will increase each week.
- There will be questions referencing the Catholic Church and the differences between what is being learned and what was taught during childhood as Catholics.

The researcher used a triangulation of observations to check the progress and ensured translation of the data was as accurate as possible. The researcher's evaluation, the participant notetaker, and the group insider's evaluations were all used to reinforce what was heard and experienced during the project.

Issues

The most important issue for the implementation was for the researcher to know that each step of the project was being understood by the participants. In most circumstances the attrition would be an indicator of disinterest or misunderstanding, but the project had only three sessions and also had dinner as an incentive to attend so the researcher had to be diligent in receiving feedback from the group each week to know that the participants grasped the concepts and purpose of each week's lesson and that they also understood the interconnectedness of the lessons.

The researcher of such a project must be prepared to adapt the weekly lessons if he finds that the group is misunderstanding or is disengaged with the style of teaching. For example, in this study someone in the group asked questions about the Catholic Church and why the Church did not encourage members to read the Bible. The researcher had to begin the next session by addressing that question through research, consulting the Catholic Catechism and inquiring of a local priest.

Questions

The follow-up questions during the personal exit interviews were standardized and simple. The researcher asked each participant the following:

1. What did you enjoy best about the experience?
2. Is there anything you would change or do differently?
3. You did/did not change your view on the Bible. Explain.
4. You did/did not change your view on trusting God. Explain.
5. You did/did not change your view on death and salvation. Explain.
6. Have you accepted Christ as your Savior?
7. Is there anything that would help you on your spiritual journey?
8. Which other Christian topics might you enjoy exploring?

The researcher took note of any obstacles revealed by the group that ranged in age from sixty-five to ninety-two years. These revelations may help aid future researchers in understanding which methods can be effective in teaching and helping the elderly engage in topics that address biblical understanding, trusting God, and the assurance of salvation.

The data was processed in an Excel spreadsheet and the researcher compared results from the group before and after the intervention of three teaching segments. The analysis included a comparison of the gap scores before and after the intervention. The gap score was determined by rating each participant's questionnaire on a point value system where "0" was perfect or no gap and the three gap areas carried positive point values. Therefore, the greater number of points a person had, the greater gap in each of the three areas. The analysis also included a composite score from Catholic residents to determine if they had a greater gap. Finally, the questions that participants asked during the sessions were noted and logged for analysis. The researcher examined an increase in the number of questions asked from one session to the next.

Chapter 4

Results

The results section offers the outcomes of the project and the reaction and response of the participants to the teaching lessons intervention. It contains a comparison of spiritual gap deficiency scores before the intervention was introduced and following its implementation. The researcher examined questions asked by the participants throughout the three weeks of teaching, and the outcomes are included in this section.

Through the work and participation of the residents and the corresponding staff, the three-fold project was completed. The large group session was intended to be presented to as many of the 108 residents as were interested and able to attend. The goal was to have interest from thirty residents of which ten to twelve would be selected to participate in the next phase of the study, a series of three sessions taught over dinner on consecutive Monday evenings on the three key issues to be addressed by the investigator. The strategy of recruitment of the initial group included two written invitations, three in-person announcements to groups attending Thursday worship sessions, and placement of the event on the televised calendar. An additional incentive was the compensation of attendees through door prizes that included an electric blanket, a meal with the campus pastor and his wife, and a \$25 gift certificate to a local pharmacy among others. The result of the recruitment and information effort was that twenty-nine residents attended the initial information meeting out of a possible 105 residents that were available to be present (one resident had died and two residents had moved out since the time recruitment had begun). The result showed that 27.6

percent of residents attended the initial information session that described the project and led to the selection of research participants.

Recruiting elderly research participants can be a difficult undertaking. Studies show that the elderly may be wary of such participation because they do not perceive its personal benefit to them, they do not trust the research staff, or they find themselves in poor health or have mobility problems they believe would limit their participation.¹²⁸ Those attending the session were surprised that fewer residents attended as free food (a dessert buffet was served) and prizes would be an incentive for more to attend. However, one attendee remarked, “Many people here will just attend what they think is either fun or easy, like Bingo. They can do it and might win a prize. Maybe they didn’t know exactly what this was, so they were afraid.” The incentives of food and prizes may have had some positive effect on recruitment. Jennings found that offering incentive payments to the elderly resulted in more responding to the invitation letter and slightly more randomized participants, but the overall result was marginal.¹²⁹ The rationale for offering the prizes and dessert to this particular group was to offer comfort in introducing a request for lengthier participation in the next phase. Overall the recruitment strategy led to a vibrant group of twenty-nine that were engaged and asked pertinent questions about the study and the participation that would be requested in the second phase. An outside observer noted the following questions during the concluding piece of the initial informational gathering:

1. I have trouble reading because I cannot see well. Will I have to read a lot to be part of this?

¹²⁸ Véronique Provencher et al., “Challenges and Strategies Pertaining to Recruitment and Retention of Frail Elderly in Research Studies: A Systematic Review,” *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 59, no. 1 (2014): 18.

¹²⁹ C. G. Jennings et al., “Does Offering an Incentive Payment Improve Recruitment to Clinical Trials and Increase the Proportion of Socially Deprived and Elderly Participants?” *Trials* 16, no. 80 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-015-0582-8>.

Response: *No, these lessons are customized so that you will not have to read any information. Although there will be a handout that summarizes the lesson, it is not necessary to read to be a part of this study. For those having difficulty reading the questionnaire and completing it, they will be given assistance to complete it verbally.*

2. I am Catholic, so is this something that I will be able to understand?

Response: *Yes, there may be some new concepts that may not have been emphasized in your faith tradition such as the assurance of salvation, but any terms that may not be readily known will be explained and you will have an opportunity to ask questions at different intervals of each learning session.*

3. What happens if we can't be at all of the meetings?

If you have a prior commitment or are ill and cannot attend, please leave a message for me at the front desk if you know that you cannot attend. If able, you will be given the information from a missed session individually so that you will have some of the information. Unfortunately dinner cannot be provided for those not attending in person.

4. I don't normally get dinners here, how is this paid? I hope you are not paying for it.

The administration of [redacted] supports this project and has agreed to cover the costs of all meals for participants and the researcher for all three of the sessions for those that attend.

5. I'm not sure about this. I would like to do it but I'm just not sure I can sign this consent. Is it OK if I speak to my daughter first before I agree?

Yes, you may speak to your daughter if you are worried about the consent form. You may take it with you and return it within five days. Selections for the participant phase of the study will be made in one week.

6. How are you going to do this in one hour?

Each session will be one hour and will include the most important information for each subject. Interaction will be limited during the teaching portions, but there will be time in the middle and at the end for participants to ask questions. The purpose will be to present information that was known but could have been misunderstood, unknown, or known but the purpose was not clear. Each session builds on the one before it, which is why it is important to attend all three of the sessions.

7. Will we get to see the results once you have completed your thesis?

Yes, when the thesis is accepted for publication, the results will be shared with the participant group.

8. Can we meet with you in between the meetings to talk about what was said?

Yes, if you found that something was not clear or if there was a questions that you did not get to ask during the session, you may ask for clarification in person or over the telephone.

The Results of the Intervention Plan: Statistical Mean

Twelve elderly residents agreed to participate in the intervention plan that spanned four weeks. One resident informed the researcher that she would not be able to participate before the first session began; health complications precipitated her request to resign from the study. The twelve remaining participants each completed all three of the intervention sessions and the final individual follow-up meeting. It was anticipated that more participants would miss sessions, but the group of twelve prevailed and persisted in each element. Table 4.1 shows the Attendee Checklist that was used to track each resident, their demographic information, and the “gap” that they would bring to the sessions.

Table 4.1. Participant number assignment, attendance, and initial gap

Number	New Number	Attendance			Gaps
		Session #1	Session #2	Session #3	
3	1	Y	Y	Y	B, G
5	2	Y	Y	Y	
6	3	Y	Y	Y	
7	4	Y	Y	Y	B
11	5	Y	Y	Y	B, H
25	6	Y	Y	Y	B, G, H
26	7	Y	Y	Y	B, H
27	8	Y	Y	Y	B
36	9	Y	Y	Y	B, H
45	10	Y	Y	Y	B, H
47	11	Y	Y	Y	H
48	12	Y	Y	Y	B
Total	12	Y=12	Y=12	Y=12	B=9, G=2, H=5

Note: B =Bible deficiency; G = a trust in God gap; H = a gap in understanding assurance of salvation or fear of death

The reassignment of numbers was straightforward in order to better organize the data. The gaps were defined as “B” for Bible deficiency, “G” for a trust in God gap, and “H” for a gap in understanding assurance of salvation or fear of death. Two individuals were eliminated from this data as they never began the sessions and withdrew before the sessions began. Two individuals did not register any gaps based on the questionnaire. Their inclusion was decided to round out the group as well as to determine if they may have self-assessed an increase in any of the areas after the teaching sessions. Four individuals registered one gap through the initial screening, which included three B gaps and one H. Two gaps were associated with five of the participants with the “BH”

combination linking four of the five and the “BG” for the other. One participant demonstrated a gap in all three areas.

The questionnaire scores of the participants before and after the sessions are shown in Table 4.2. The participant numbers were reassigned from their original random number to be sequenced from 1 to 12 for greater continuity and examination. The table reflects the new student number in the first column, their initial response score taken at the group meeting before any intervention, and the score for each participant after the three sessions in column three. The difference of these scores is calculated in the last column and the statistical mean is given at the bottom of the chart.

Table 4.2. Results of pre- and post-intervention

Participant	Church	Pre-intervention Gap Score	Post Gap Score	Difference
1	C	7	1	6
2	P	0	0	0
3	P	0	0	0
4	P	3	0	3
5	P	5	1	4
6	C	8	1	7
7	C	4	1	3
8	O	3	2	1
9	C	4	2	2
10	O	5	1	4
11	C	1	0	1
12	P	4	2	2
Mean		3.67	0.92	2.75

Note: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other

As a group, the participant scores decreased by an average of 2.75, indicating that the gaps in knowledge became smaller and that the intervention was effective. Zero represented the expected

score for the correct and acceptable responses. The intention was that the teaching sessions would build on one another so that the most crucial question of fearing death and uncertainty of salvation would be a zero for each participant. The greatest decrease in the spiritual gap was scored by Participant 1 (six points) and Participant 7 (seven points). Not surprisingly, these participants were both Catholic.

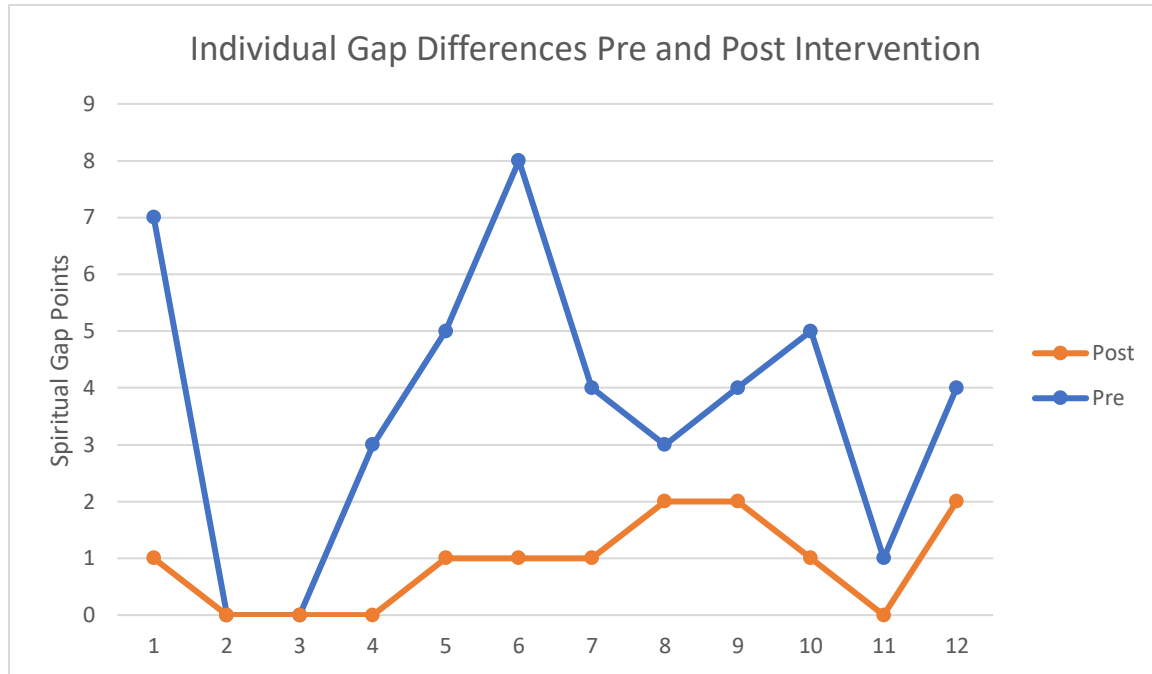


Figure 4.1. Individual spiritual gap totals.

Figure 4.1 shows the reduction of the spiritual gap for all twelve of the participants. Ten of the twelve demonstrated a reduction in a spiritual gap of either biblical literacy, trust in God, or misconception of death or salvation, or a combination of the three. Participants 2 and 3 showed no change from their initial zero gap although both participants noted that they had a better understanding of all three elements after the teaching sessions were concluded. Six of the twelve participants had a gap of three or more points, above the total average difference of 2.75.

Individual Gap Area Scores

The assumption that more participants would display a gap in biblical literacy that could be addressed by the intervention was proved true. All except three participants had some gap in Bible knowledge or understanding. Table 4.3 notes each participant and the gap score for each. The smallest gap was found in trusting God, which exhibited a 0.167 average gap and only two residents scored this as a problem. Half of the group had a gap in death/salvation.

Table 4.3. Individual gap scores for three areas pre-intervention

Participant	Church	Bible Gap	Trust Gap	Death Gap
1	C	6	1	0
2	P	0	0	0
3	P	0	0	0
4	P	3	0	0
5	P	2	0	3
6	C	6	1	1
7	C	2	0	2
8	O	3	0	0
9	C	3	0	1
10	O	3	0	2
11	C	0	0	1
12	P	4	0	0
Mean		2.67	0.167	0.833

Note: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other

Prior to any intervention, most of the participants showed a lack of biblical understanding. Even the three that scored a zero gap for that category intimated their need for clear and more consistent Bible teaching during the first teaching session. The idea that the Bible is true and is without error was a new thought for many of the participants. It appeared that most had not wrestled

with the inerrancy of Scripture topic but rather considered what made sense to them was true and that which did not was questionable.

The *t*-Test for Two Dependent Means

To solidify the conclusion of significance for the four-week interventions, the investigator used the *t*-test approach to examine if there was more than a random chance of change in the participant behavior based on the interventions of teaching the Bible, probing literature that supports trust in God, and presenting evidence for the assurance of salvation for Christians. A one-tailed test was performed with paired data to compare elderly residents' understanding of the topics before their learning experience and after.

This research proposed that there would be a difference in each of the areas and presumed that the greatest spiritual gap would be in biblical understanding. The expected *p*-value of 0.05 was assumed necessary for this study to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no difference. Overall, and in each of the three areas, there was expected to be a decrease in spiritual gap scores. Figure 4.2 demonstrates the gap for each of the areas studied and the corresponding *p*-values from the *t*-test. The lower the value, the greater significance for the hypothesis that the intervention made a positive impact on the spiritual deficiency of the participant.

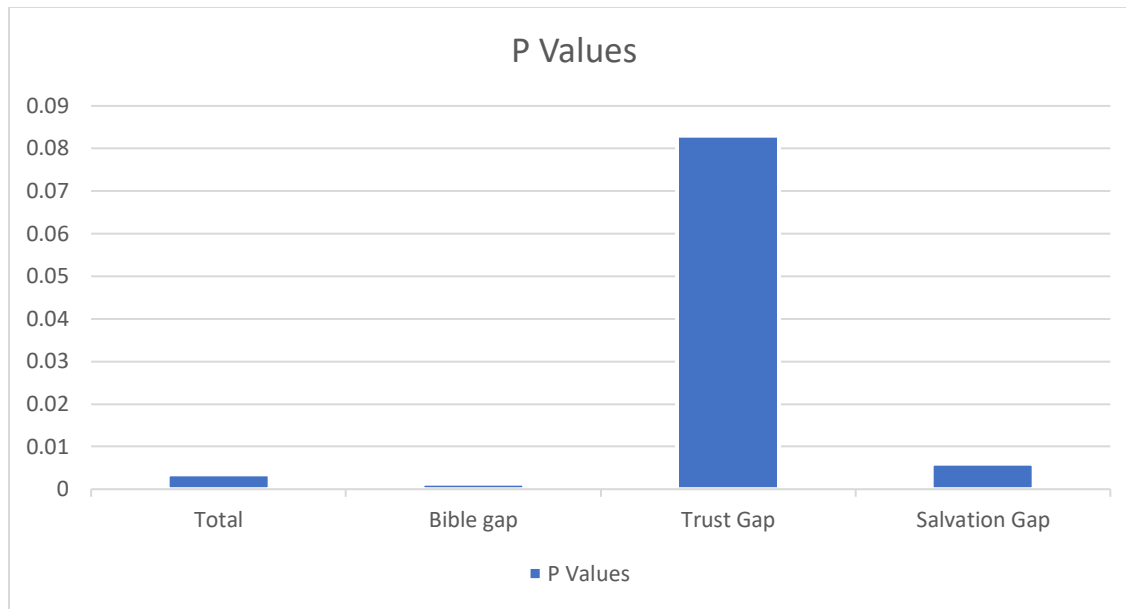


Figure 4.2. The *t*-test results for spiritual gaps.

The researcher used a decrease in total scores values to demonstrate that each participant would move closer to the preferred zero gap between understanding and belief in biblical truth, trust in God, and assurance of salvation. The totals of scores together for the group was statistically affirming of the hypothesis for the group (0.00343). The biblical knowledge gap was the largest (as was expected). It was also statically significant with a *p*-value closest to zero (0.00137). The salvation gap/fear of death was measured to be 0.00603 and significant as well. This is the value of most urgent concern to the research.

The proper ratio for each of the gap areas should be 1:1:1; in that they are related and analogous to one another. Stanglin supports Arminius' view that assurance of salvation cannot have a greater certainty than God's existence (biblical knowledge) or Christ's work (trust), but rather it may rest on the foundation of the two.¹³⁰ The researcher is looking for the three gaps to be in lock step with one another. Each informs and is a reason to eliminate doubt for the next. For example, if

¹³⁰ Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609*, Brill's Series in Church History 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

biblical knowledge is thorough and sound, the participant would be able to recall Scriptures that informed them on trust for God and trust in His word. From Proverbs 3:5 to Matthew 6:25 to Hebrews 13:6, the student of the Bible will be able to discern trust for God in many circumstances and situations. Likewise, those that trust in the Lord and go to God for answers to life's questions will find ample evidence to understand God's plan in knowing their salvation is secure in Christ (John 5:24; John 3:36; John 10:28; Romans 10:9; 2 Timothy 2:10–13). The data informed that trust in God was not a significant factor and this was confirmed during exit interviews with the participants. In their determination, trust in God was handed down to them by former generations; however, that trust was not necessarily informed by Scripture.

The Catholic Residents

It was hypothesized that the Catholic residents would have larger gaps in all categories than their Protestant neighbors in the residence. The 2016 study by Barna suggested that Catholics identify themselves as spending little time reading the Bible.¹³¹ Stephen Binz paints a portrait familiar to many who have grown up as Catholics as he refers to their personal handling of the Bible: “Most Catholic homes had a family Bible usually with gilt-edged pages and filled with pages of religious art. More often than not, the Bible held an honored place in the family living room and contained the baptism, marriage, and funeral records of the members of the family.”¹³²

For many Catholics, as Binz contends, the belief is that some deacon or priest should know the Bible, for that is their role, and that information should be made known to the parishioner when they attend mass.¹³³ If that is the case for Catholics, their deference to priests and other leaders may

¹³¹ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 68.

¹³² Stephen Binz, *Introduction to the Bible: A Catholic Guide to Studying Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 27.

¹³³ Binz, *Introduction to the Bible*, 27.

have waned as trust in Catholic leadership and their moral authority has been questioned in light of the lack of accountability of leadership regarding sexual abuse scandals.¹³⁴ While Bible utility may be in question among Catholics, the curiosity for God among elderly residents in the facility studied was genuine and strong.

The mean total spiritual gap for Catholic respondents was 4.8 as compared to Protestant and other residents scoring a 2.86. There were only two participants that had a question about trust in God, and they were both Catholic. All except for one Catholic participant had a gap listed for death/salvation, which was determined to be a critical element for the intervention. While separating the group into denominational differences could prove useful, it would be important to increase the number of respondents for these results to have validity. This study indicated that Catholic elderly residents have greater spiritual gaps than Protestants and therefore a campus pastor might recruit Catholic residents and initiate activities that could introduce them to spiritual truths that relate to salvation issues from a biblical perspective.

Self-Assessment of Areas

The participants were able to self-assess their progress upon completion of the second questionnaire. They responded to the question, “Do you believe that you have gained a greater understanding or knowledge of the Bible, trust in God or assurance of salvation?” Table 4.4 lists church background along with the corresponding assessment of growth in each of the areas.

¹³⁴ M. O’Keefe, *American Catholic Bishops and the Politics of Scandal* (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429019746>.

Table 4.4. Participant self-assessment of increased knowledge in studied areas

Participant	Church	Bible Gap	Trust Gap	Death Gap
1	C	Y	N	N
2	P	Y	Y	Y
3	P	Y	Y	Y
4	P	Y	Y	Y
5	P	Y	Y	Y
6	C	Y	Y	Y
7	C	N	Y	N
8	O	Y	N	N
9	C	Y	Y	Y
10	O	Y	Y	Y
11	C	Y	Y	Y
12	P	Y	N	N
Percentage Y		91.6	75.0	66.7

Note: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other

Participants may have found the teaching on biblical truth the most cogent and therefore the most relevant to their needs. In this regard they believed that any new information might be valuable as each looked to biblical knowledge as a weakness or deficit. The idea that so few may have a spiritual gap in trusting God yet so many believed that they gained knowledge or an increase in that area is attributed to the connection made between biblical knowledge and trusting in God. Comments from the participants during follow-up interviews affirmed their awareness of the tie between the segments of teaching.

Second Measure: Questions Asked

The next measure proposed was that participants would ask more questions as the sessions went along. There was no presumption with regard to gender or church background. The questions

were recorded by a participant who was recruited and instructed as to how to note the question and the gender of the individual that inquired. The question-taker was instructed to note only the question asked and the gender of the participant and not match the name of the participant to the question. The participation of the number of males in this study was unexpected. Figure 4.1 includes questions based on age, gender and quantity of questions asked during the sessions.

Table 4.5. Demographic breakdown of questions asked

Participant	Church	Gender	Age	Num of Qs
1	C	M	>73	1
2	P	F	>73	3
3	P	F	>73	2
4	P	F	>73	2
5	P	F	>73	5
6	C	M	>73	6
7	C	M	<73	8
8	O	M	>73	0
9	C	M	<73	2
10	O	F	>73	0
11	C	F	<73	1
12	P	F	>73	1
Totals	P=5, C=5, O=2	M=5, F=7	>73=9, <73=3	31

Note: C = Catholic, P = Protestant, O = Other

Even though men were fewer, they asked more questions in this particular group. Five men combined to ask seventeen of the thirty-one questions, while seven women asked the remainder of the questions. Participants 6 and 7 asked the most questions with six and eight respectively. The investigator did not limit the participants from asking any number of questions; however, two residents apologized on behalf of Participant 7, suggesting that this participant dominated more of

the question time. After the first session, even though there were only six questions, the discussion was lengthy. Two participants reiterated that the time should be called when one hour was completed and those wishing to continue could talk as others would be free to leave. This clarification was given at the start of the next two sessions and at the beginning of the time for questions near the end of the sessions.

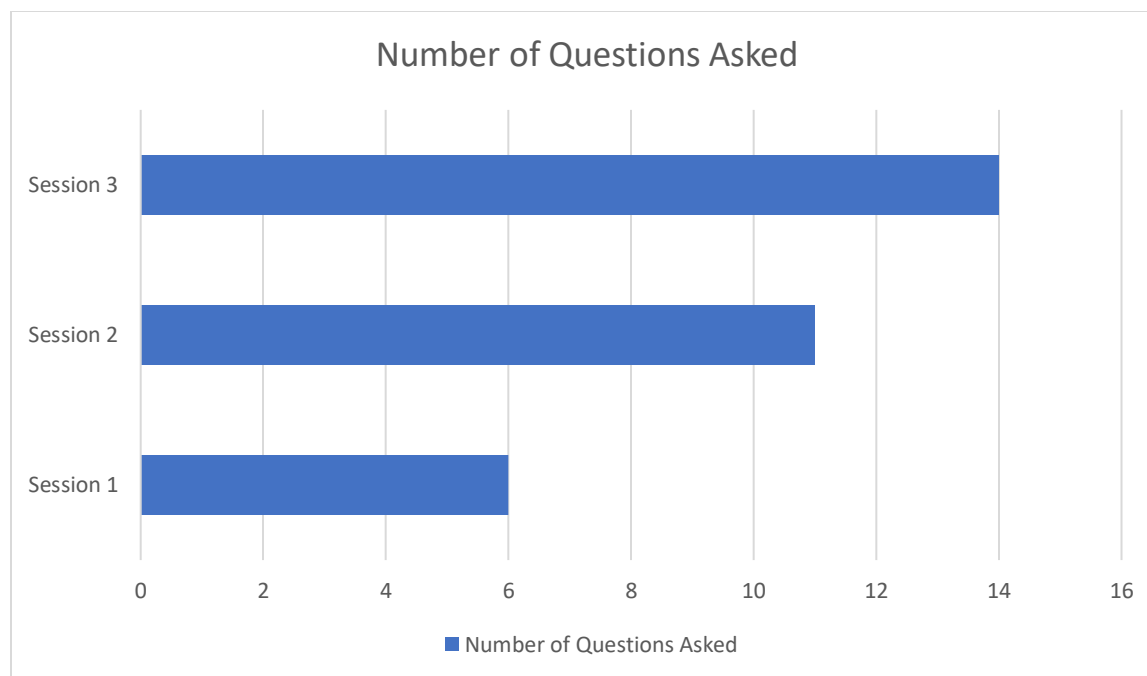


Figure 4.3. Number of questions asked after each session.

Session one concluded at 4:45 p.m. and left fifteen minutes for questions at the end. Interestingly, all questions asked upon completion of the first session were from male participants. All participants seemed comfortable yet alert during the first session. It was expected that questions after the first session would seek clarification of unclear points in the teaching or be related to the topical information. Only the third question fell into that category. The other questions seemed to hint at a curiosity and a comfort with the group and the setting as a whole. It did not appear as if any participant was embarrassed to ask a question, and no participant appeared to make negative remarks about the nature of the questions asked. The investigator found the questions refreshing and

their nature gave some glimpse as to how to proceed for the following week. That direction included a brief review and a reinforcement of the concepts taught in the previous week. Here are the questions asked (in order) from the conclusion of Session 1: “Why the Bible is true”:

1. Was Thomas an apostle? What is the difference between “apostle” and “disciple”?
2. What is the Nazarene Church? My wife was a Nazarene and I never really knew what they believed exactly.
3. What were the prophecies exactly? Did they only come from the Old Testament?
4. How did prophets do their jobs?
5. Who came first, Moses or Noah?
6. How did Moses write about Noah?

The researcher took about thirty-five minutes to answer the questions at the end of the session. It was decided that the session should end on time and not go over its limit, but some participants could remain to discuss additional questions or address the investigator after the one-hour session was completed. That practice and understanding would be implemented successfully in the two sessions that followed.

Session 2 began on time at 4:30 p.m. the following Monday with all participants in attendance seated exactly where they had been a week earlier, although no such assignments were required or expected. Prayer and a brief review of the previous week began the study that included an overview of the current week’s emphasis of trust in God. The investigator received feedback from the participants that they enjoyed the first session and that they now knew better what to expect in the format and the flow of the lesson. The participants were able to answer the question, “With what do we trust God?” in the middle of the lesson by giving the following responses:

- Healing from our illnesses

- Our lives
- Relational life
- Our salvation
- Our past, present, and future
- Our death

At the conclusion of the second session, participants were more engaged as many more asked questions and the questions came from both male and female residents. The question period began at 5:15 p.m. and concluded at 5:35 p.m. These were the questions that were asked:

1. Is Jeremiah in the Old or New Testament?
2. Is it good to talk to God every day?
3. When someone kills ten people, how can they possibly deserve a place in heaven?
4. If someone believes in God, how is it possible for them to kill ten people?
5. If someone is in the electric chair and decides at the last minute that they believe in God, will they be saved?
6. If God knows our destiny, how can we have free will?
7. Are Millennials spiritual or do they have real faith?
8. Is there anything in the Bible that explains free will?
9. Does anyone think that [at this residence facility] people fear death?
10. How can the younger generation be brought to church if they never were raised that way?
11. Why do women attend more faith-structured programs than men?

Discussion on several topics continued between the investigator and several participants for fifteen more minutes. Discussion between participants continued after the investigator had left, as the second session came to a close.

The final session of “Food for Thought” began with eleven of the twelve participants at their places at 4:40 p.m. The researcher found the last participant in her residence as she was on her way to the session. The final session began with a table prayer and a review of the previous two sessions at 4:45 p.m. The participants were reminded that this was the last session and that there would be a questionnaire to complete at the end. Also, before they left, a schedule for the follow-up interview would be distributed to complete the study. The group was attentive for the teaching on salvation and death. It appeared that questions asked at the conclusion of Session 3 related to all of the previous studies and, again, some were outside of those areas. The questions were received beginning at 5:15 and concluded at 5:25 p.m.:

1. Is there a sequence for chapter placement in the Bible? Alphabetic?
2. Isn't believing in Jesus a requirement for going to heaven?
3. What do atheists believe in?
4. Do Jewish people read the Quran or some other book?
5. Why did Jesus say, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”
6. Is the Trinity three separate entities?
7. How did apostles receive the Holy Spirit?
8. Why is the Holy Spirit like a dove?
9. Why was the Book of Revelation needed?
10. Did Hitler or Stalin go to hell or heaven?
11. Will the Holy Spirit leave you if you sin?
12. Why did Catholics baptize babies when they could not speak?
13. Didn't Jesus know he was going to be crucified on the cross?
14. Who did God not like?

The questions were answered in brief as there was not much time to go into depth for the response. Participants were encouraged to look up the scriptures given that supported the answers if that was the case. The questionnaire was given to the participants at 5:25 p.m., and the last one was completed at 5:40 p.m. While the participants ordered dinner, a schedule for the follow-up was circulated at 4:45 p.m. Each resident selected a time and place to meet individually to discuss any questions they had and to assess any gains that they made personally during the three-week period.

Follow-up Sessions

The concluding individual session with each participant was intended to encourage the participants in their faith and determine if the format was something that was conducive to their spiritual development. They would have a time to ask questions privately and clarify anything that they did not want to discuss in front of the group. The schedule that was distributed during session 3 was completed and gave participants the opportunity to choose the location for the discussion (their apartment, the office of the campus pastor, or the dining area). Each participant chose a time and the follow-up sessions were completed as scheduled.

The follow-up conversations included discussing the individual results of the participants and if they agreed with their results. Each participant said that they agreed with the results of both assessments. A common theme among the group was that they enjoyed the format and the food. They also enjoyed one another's company and being able to discuss spiritual topics in this manner. Five of the twelve residents mentioned that they would like to continue the sessions in some way with other topics of interests. The following list presents some of the comments recorded during the follow-up interviews:

- "Even though you said I did not have any spiritual gaps to start with, I learned a lot and I now understand that there is so much about the Bible that I do not understand."
- "I really liked the first session about the prophecies. I did not know about any of that."

- “We never really learned the Bible in the Catholic Church. No one told me that I should be reading it, so I didn’t. We just did what we were told.”
- “I didn’t know what to really expect with these sessions. It was a lot clearer after the first one.”
- “The differences in the experiences of the men and women were interesting. I liked having both men and women in the group together.”
- “I wasn’t sure if I was sure I was going to heaven, if that makes sense. But after the session, I knew why I am going now.”
- “The food was excellent. I liked the length of the sessions.”
- “The only thing I would change would be sticking to the time limit.”
- “If my husband could only be in there, maybe he would be able to have faith.”

Comparison of Results to Expectations

It was expected that elderly participants would lack some fundamental knowledge of the Bible. The Catholic participants each self-identified as being deficient in Bible during the follow-up interview. It was presumed more than two would have difficulty in trusting God because of their lack of biblical understanding. Possible reasons for a low level of biblical understanding and a high level of trust collectively for God is that all twelve residents received some spiritual training initiated by their parents when they were young. For most, it was participation in Sunday School (Protestants) or Catechism (Catholics) that helped them to trust God as they were “taught” to trust God. Trust in God signifies hope that one can know God. “Trust in God” was the second of three lessons, in which participants found themselves in the middle, rather than at the peak of their understanding based on three interventions. The intervention plan included that trust be preceded by biblical knowledge and followed by teaching on salvation and the elimination of fear of death. In addition, the outcome was intended to prompt participants to consider their purpose or mission and how their faith might inform them as to how to worship or share this faith within the elderly

residence community. The study, however, was limited in its scope; therefore, it did not function to lead participants in evangelism or in discipleship. It served its purpose to uncover the spiritual gaps in elderly residents and, with brief but pointed exposure to biblical truth in specific areas, proved that God could bridge the gaps of elderly residents to allow them spiritual growth as a result of the intervention.

The 2.67 mean Bible gap that was affected by the intervention was the most notable. It was apparent that discussions surrounding all three of the sessions included interest in and questions around the Word of God. Most had not spend time in their youth developing an appetite for Bible reading or study even if they had participated in group gatherings or led Bible studies. Initiating Bible reading for themselves has proven to be lacking but desired at this time of their lives.

The measurement of “number of questions asked” was designed to inform the investigator as to the engagement of the elderly adults. There was no expectation as to how this would proceed. If the group of elderly participants became tired of the process, one would expect the questions to lessen as the sessions progressed. The number of questions asked did not diminish with each teaching segment; instead, the participants proved to be increasingly engaged, asking more questions each week without sign of embarrassment. The males dominated the first session asking all of the questions, but that changed as a more balanced participation of questioning came from the group during the final two sessions. The number of questions asked did increase during the project. This could be from a comfort in the process and with one another or may have had something to do with their interest being piqued, or perhaps it was the nature of the sessions and their building on one another that led to an increase.

Unexpected Results

The recruitment of participants brought 41.6 percent males to the study. This was unexpected as only as many as 15 percent of men attend religious-based programs such as worship services at the facility. This provided welcomed insight into the interests and interaction between men and women learning together. The men seemed most comfortable sitting near one another and did so at each session. They talked among themselves and clarified statements they heard at the sessions by talking to one another. The women participants more consistently asked for clarification from the researcher.

The sharp decrease in gap knowledge for Catholics was not unexpected, but their participation in the study was less than certain before the recruitment took place. It was important for the investigator to provide an invitation that would interest Catholics as it was perceived that they would have gaps in these spiritual areas of greater numbers. The goal was to have three or more Catholic residents in a group of twelve. Originally, as the study was designed, it was supposed that all the participants might have greater gaps and be Catholics. Instead, the study went forward with a fair representation from Catholics, Protestants, and others.

Implementation and Design

Ideally the intervention tool would have been more comprehensive to be thorough in tracing a gap back to a biblical knowledge deficiency, a problem with trusting in God due to erroneous teaching received or misinterpreted faith taught by parents, and a broader understanding of fear, death, heaven, and hell. These issues were discussed with the preliminary group of elderly residents that advised on the structure of the intervention questionnaire. This group was unanimous that the questionnaire should be kept to one page. They reiterated that most residents were over the age of eighty and that many were no longer writing and instead had family members handling their bills

and other writing tasks. The instrument, therefore, was imperfect in that it did not dig deeply enough into the three separate areas. The investigator could have used the eight or nine questions to examine one of the three areas and then taught remediation during three sessions on that one topic. The goal, however, was to build upon the truth of the Bible to inform on the issues of trust and salvation that would follow. Time was a limitation for both the questionnaire and the teaching segments. The researcher adhered to advice from residents and administrators of the facility recommending that a one-hour time limit on teaching would be the maximum that elderly residents could sustain. Due to the cost of meals and the consideration that residents might not persist beyond the three weeks, the study was limited to three weeks of teaching and one week of follow-up. If time allowed, the investigator would have considered a group follow-up session in addition to individual sessions. This may have generated even more direction for campus pastors wishing to serve the elderly population in residence facilities.

The Analysis Tool

The nine-question questionnaire hinted at the deficiencies of the participants. The follow-up discussions proved to be valuable to understand what was behind a particular gap for a participant. For example, one resident did not understand what the “3” stood for in John 3:16, which was one of the questions that illustrated biblical knowledge. Even though that was explained during the first session, this person answered incorrect on the re-take. When asked about it during the follow-up interview, the participant’s response was, “Yeah, I know I put Trinity the first time and this time I put verse, so I guess I’m getting closer.” This eighty-seven-year-old resident may have been able to retain the information in years past, but aging does create obstacles and barriers to learning and retaining information.

The Intervention Plan: The Teaching

The teaching was organized into three tightly woven separate but linked lessons. Teaching segments were designed to address absences of information and knowledge and fill those gaps with correct information in a way that elderly adults might recall later. The majority of the participants did not understand the organization of the Bible: testaments, books, chapters, and verses. None had read through the entire Bible. The results determined that focused teaching, even brief, had an effect on the participants' recollection of the truth when re-tested.

It should be noted that the study components were revealed to the larger group of residents before the intervention plan was undertaken. The residents understood that this was a study to address their gaps in spiritual understanding. With that as its impetus, it would take a rather humble person to agree, after having lived eighty years or more, that there were some things they missed about God, the Bible and faith, and they were willing to come forward and be taught. That is what occurred in this study. A possible pitfall would have been for participants to be offended by the material or the biblical truth presented as an absolute and discontinue the study. The researcher had access to a group of two trusted individuals to talk through the teaching points for each session with that in mind: would the information be offensive to the individuals attending? The participants did not voice any offense with the information or how it was presented.

Possible Next Steps for Research

For the individuals to move in position from uncertainty to certainty of salvation would require an additional step: confessing of a sinful condition and confessing Jesus as Lord. These conversations would continue from the follow-up that was offered individually. The residents that have considered themselves "dedicated followers" of Jesus would need to be taught how to share their faith. Only one of the twelve participants had any knowledge of what it meant to evangelize or

share their faith in God with other people. The opportunity to share their faith in a residential community where death is frequent and expected could be crucial for many of the elderly who are looking for a purpose or mission and do not work, do not cook for themselves, and have their needs met in great measure by the facility and its staff. However, many residents have informed the campus pastor that they lack purpose in their old age. This would be a good next step to explore.

The results underscored a definitive need for campus pastors in elderly resident communities to produce a plan to gather small groups and train them in spiritual development before the end of life. The recruitment of residents to learn of the project netted fewer than the number of individuals expected for the event. It is the researcher's opinion that there was fear among some of the residents (as explained during the follow-up conversations) that they may be asked to read, write, or recite, and many would have been apprehensive had this been the case. The campus pastor could do more to dispel this and also utilize the participant alumni to explain the process during future endeavors. The selected participants for the "Food for Thought" teaching segments exceeded expectations in terms of their persistence of 100 percent attendance, candidness in asking an increasing number of diverse questions and demonstrating gaps in the spiritual needs addressed. There is much that can be continued from this study. It would be of great interest to this researcher to generate a new group with only Catholic participants and address their specific denominational concerns in the process.

Conclusion

The final results of the teaching intervention revealed that the elderly in this interdenominational resident facility can persist in their attendance of Bible lessons and bridge the gap between Bible knowledge and assurance of salvation. This group had the capacity to become increasingly engaged in the lessons as demonstrated by asking more questions and revealing that

they had acquired greater knowledge upon completion of the study. They have shown the capacity to learn and the interest in gathering together to discuss important matters of faith, religion, the Bible with others that may have come from different backgrounds or perspectives.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to uncover biblical and faith limitations of elderly residents and address these gaps in brief group learning sessions that allowed for comfort and candor among the participants. The available research seems to circle around the idea of this study but does not provide enough specific depth to address the heart of the matter.

For example, Barna discerns that biblical literacy among Elders (those from generations prior to the Baby Boomers) and Boomers exceeds that of the younger generations.¹³⁵ The inference may be that they are doing quite well. However, what is lacking is a comparison with previous generations that would have been considered “elderly.” The problem with this, however, is that there is no fair comparison in that eighty-five-year-old individuals from different eras are not the same. Life expectancy, life span, financial status, retirement, and activity have all substantially changed in the past fifty years, meaning the definition of “elderly” may be substantially different than in years past.¹³⁶ Also, there has been a decrease in Bible reading, church attendance, and Bible study over several decades. Today’s elderly are a product of the decline in biblical understanding, and it should be a concern for their ministers and church. The difference for older adults is that they face more imminent death because of their age than younger generations. They also face physical

¹³⁵ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 49.

¹³⁶ Robin Schupper, “Could Changing Our Definition of ‘Elderly’ Positively Impact Higher Education?” *Journal of Online Higher Education* 1, no. 3 (2017): 3, <https://doaj.org/article/684e700d32e242e39d49f44ef0aafe8f>.

complications that make it challenging for them, had they decided to begin spiritual disciplines, to do them. Difficulty with vision, concentration, and memory all lead to obstacles for the elderly in the faith to pursue a new deeper development of their faith. The pastor to the elderly must address these gaps in their faith before they decline too steeply.

The problem that this project addressed is that there are specific gaps in the faith that are most crucial and that build upon each other. The crisis that was mentioned in the statement of the problem was reinforced through an understanding of the individuals and their misconceptions of biblical truth or lack of familiarity with the truth of God's word. The presupposition of the researcher was that the elderly in the residence being studied lacked biblical understanding, trust in God, and certainty of their salvation due to being ill informed. The results of the intervention confirmed that a majority of participants lacked biblical understanding, and a significant portion lacked confidence in salvation or feared death. There was a general trust in God, however. This group believed in God and in God's ability to control personal and world events; they trusted in the sovereignty and authority of God. Follow-up interviews indicated that this trust in God did not necessarily emanate from a biblical understanding that would have informed the participants as to God's personal relationship to each of them and His plan for their salvation.

In this regard, the researcher could have focused more attention of the differentiation between fearing death and being certain of salvation, leaving the category of trusting God as a given. Several residents who had experienced recent deaths of their spouses were encouraged to participate in the study. None of them agreed to the second phase of teaching. It would have been interesting also to have a group of elderly residents that had experienced a recent loss and discuss trusting God with them. The juxtaposition of a lack of biblical acuity with the loss of a spouse could lead to a breakdown in trusting God and a possible trauma that might include despair and

depression for the elderly resident. More thought and planning would need to be undertaken to recruit such a group for a future project.

The researcher taught the residents on three topics of urgent need: the Bible as truth, trusting God, and how to be certain about salvation. The original questionnaire showed that all but two of the twelve participants had a gap in one or more of those areas. The researcher made observations from the three teaching sessions, the questions asked by the participants, and the individual follow-up sessions. The participants were also given a questionnaire at the end of the third session to measure their understanding of the issues. Results compared between the initial and final questionnaire demonstrated that participants bridged the gaps in Bible knowledge, trust in God, and uncertainty of salvation.

Overview

This thesis project was conducted at an elderly residence facility near a metropolitan area. The average age of the residents in the facility are mid-eighties and they live individually or with their spouse independently in apartments, in an assisted living wing, or as part of the memory care unit. All entering participants and their families understand that the facility has a faith-based mission and that regularly planned spiritual activities are provided for all residents. The ecumenical nature of the activities has made the organization unique. It is not unusual nor is it uncommon to have many different denominations of elderly Christians living next door to one another within the facility.

The need to address the problem emerged when questions largely from Catholic residents were asked at ecumenical worship services held at the facility. Many residents are not able to drive to their church and, if the weather is bad, they may not be able to attend their church in the community. The worship service at their facility has become the church for many of the residents.

From these residents attending their first “Bible-based” church service, questions have emerged. Questions that prompted this study have included, Why don’t we have Communion every week? How is it that you can pray to God without reading the prayer from a book? Is homosexuality the unforgivable sin? The senior citizens still had active minds but their ability to be vital and to grow in one capacity or another may now be limited. Many had long since retired and they have limited means of asserting themselves into productive purpose.

George Sweeting is a ninety-five-year-old author, pastor, college president, and former colleague of this researcher. He has most recently directed senior ministries at a suburban church. He said that it is difficult for the elderly to continue their involvement in life as they age, but they may find renewed involvement in life in their places of worship.¹³⁷ This also provided impetus to consider how to build a “place of worship” within a residence that contained a narrow demographic that was represented by eight or more different denominations.

The Chapters of This Project

The research project began with the presentation of the problem, the purpose for addressing it, the assumptions made, program definitions, the thesis statement, and the ministry context. The design of the context of ministry was altered from the original plan to conduct the research at two of the facilities. This did not prove to be feasible due to the scheduling conflicts at the facilities and, following advice from the researcher’s advisors, was deemed not necessary to understand the problem and help from the intervention. The facility that was chosen was selected above the other due to greater access to meeting facilities and a higher degree of privacy for the teaching dinner sessions.

¹³⁷ George Sweeting, *The Joys of Successful Aging* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 28.

Chapter 2 found precedent literature encompassing the most important elements of the study. Primarily the three areas of greatest importance were hermeneutical study of assurance of salvation, Catholic members' understanding of the Bible, and gerontological study on aging. These were largely given as separate entities as research was lacking in connecting the three. Many journal articles demonstrated research that tied medical care and the elderly with providing faith support by nurses and others medical personnel.¹³⁸ The area of interest for the researcher was specifically to address how a campus pastor working in a residential facility can navigate the needs of the elderly to positively impact their spiritual development so that they understand the vital truth of Scripture.

The research into denominational practices of informing a congregation on Scripture centered upon the Catholic church and its preparation for its members. The Catholic participants in this study met the presupposition that they would self-perceive as lacking biblical understanding because they had not read much Scripture. Barna also differentiates that while this is true of Catholics, it cannot be said that they have not "heard" much of God's Word.¹³⁹ This study concedes that possibility and does not propose to mark Catholics, as a whole, as having a greater biblical gap than other denominations. The study, however, supported a presupposition that Catholics from the facility included in the study had lower biblical attainment.

There was good literature on the certainty of salvation as well as the lack of certainty for salvation. As explained by Hoskinson, "There is a varying measure of certainty of assurance throughout Paul's epistles, but when God offers a divine statement confirming an expectation,

¹³⁸ Laurie J. Parson, "Impacting Depression in Homebound Elderly," *Journal of Christian Nursing: A Quarterly Publication of Nurses Christian Fellowship* 36, no. 2 (2019): E38–E39, <https://doi.org/10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000593>

¹³⁹ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 38.

confidence follows that it will happen.”¹⁴⁰ Absolutes are difficult to find in the world today but the Bible is replete with them. The researcher found that some of the participants were cautious about the idea of being “certain” that they were going to heaven. Even after wrestling with verses from Romans 8, some participants found it difficult to assert salvation, albeit aware of the Scripture’s meaning. Storms contends that a thorough reading of Romans 8 will bring to the reader “the sort of good news that takes your breath away, to think that those in Christ Jesus have no valid reason to ever again experience fear or apprehension about their relationship with God or their eternal destiny.”¹⁴¹

The work of a campus pastor within the elderly residence community has, in part, the responsibility to gauge and expand the faith opportunities of the residents. In this particular role, the pastor¹⁴²:

1. Implements, organizes, and coordinates the Spiritual Care (Worship, Sacraments, Prayer, Bible Studies) to enhance the care and service of the residents.
2. Provides Sunday worship and chapel services throughout the week.
3. Implements Blessing of the Hands, Procession of Honor, and supports hospice programs as appropriate.
4. Coordinates services with outside churches as needed.
5. Provides bereavement follow-up of families for a one-year period after the death of a resident.
6. Leads and supports the integration of the Christian Culture in the community.

¹⁴⁰ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, 139.

¹⁴¹ Samuel Storms, *Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 19.

¹⁴² [Redacted], Campus Pastor Position Description, *Responsibilities and Commitment*, Revised May 2018.

7. Acts as a liaison between residents and their “home” church or acts as the pastor for those residents without a church regardless of denomination.

The conclusion the researcher drew was that an understanding of salvation would be a key component in equipping the group of elderly residents as they develop their faith in a new environment. This is a crucial time of each resident’s life and most likely, his or her life will end within the residence. Therefore, continuing to explain and generate discussion concerning end-of-life issues will be a vital area for all campus pastors that work in elderly residences.

In Chapter 3, the methodology for the research was described. The theological and theory were utilized to build three group teaching sessions and an individual follow-up interview with each of the participants. The group sessions were held during a dinner for the twelve participants. Each of these sessions lasted one hour, and they were held in a private dining area on three consecutive Monday evenings. The individual interviews were held the week following the end of the teaching sessions. The sessions included the following topics:

- Is the Bible true? This first session illustrated biblical truth by considering Acts 20:26-27, Paul’s giving of his life for the truth of God’s word. Also passages included a contemplation of eyewitnesses such as is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 as Paul illustrates how information was transferred to the listener. Many of the residents were impacted by Walvoord’s book *Every Prophecy about Jesus* as many questions followed from this information as it was given.¹⁴³
- Can we trust God? This session built upon the understanding that the Bible is true and cannot be altered or accepted in part. After a brief review of the previous week, the session

¹⁴³ John Walvoord, *Every Prophecy about Jesus* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2016), 54.

compared trusting in the idea that people are basically good¹⁴⁴ with the prospect that trust is hard to attain.¹⁴⁵ Scriptures that provided foundation for placing trust in God came from Jeremiah 1:8, 1 John 3:20, and Romans 6:23.

- Can I be certain of my salvation? The final “Food for Thought” teaching session included some work with biblical deciphering and other support for trusting in God (Proverbs 3:5; Exodus 34:6). The participants considered fears that people have and a Cornell University study about belief in the afterlife.¹⁴⁶ The certainty of salvation was brought to the participants using Scripture. First John 5:12–13 and Matthew 7:13–14 led the discussion that salvation is about Jesus’ full payment for sins and God’s grace. This idea rested on understanding the Bible is true, moving toward the concept that God is good,¹⁴⁷ and finally concluding that a good God wants his creation to know its destiny and how to get there. After the third session, the participants completed the initial questionnaire once again. No one took longer than seven minutes, and all made appointments for individual follow-up interviews.

The follow-up interviews revealed that the participants self-identified as gaining understanding from and interest in the gathering and conversations that were held. Primarily there was a great interest in understanding the Bible and looking at familiar passages of Scripture for deeper understanding and guidance. Several of the participants were emotional during the interview

¹⁴⁴ Maria van Halperen et al., *The Holocaust and Other Genocides: An Introduction*, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 68–72.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen M. R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 87.

¹⁴⁶ Roper Center, “Paradise Polled: American and the Afterlife,” Cornell University, 2020, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/paradise-polled-americans-and-afterlife>

¹⁴⁷ Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough*, 18.

and remarked that they did not understand, after so many years, how they could have missed some of the more important truths they had learned during the three weeks of lessons.

The results reported in Chapter 4 through use of a *t*-test uncovered a significant spiritual gap mitigation by the intervention in the areas of Bible knowledge and fear of death/understanding of salvation. There was less certainty that the intervention mitigated the trust in God gap among the participants, although that gap was narrow and few revealed that as a major spiritual issue.

About the Research

Recruitment for participants began with an invitation to attend an information session on February 16, 2020. The twenty-nine attendees stayed for the entire presentation and fourteen decided to move to the next phase in the project. By the time that the first session was to begin, twelve participants were available to participate in the spiritual training. The two participants that declined to begin did so for health reasons of hearing ability and doctor's appointments. They were given updates on the project by the researcher and met with the researcher privately, but their responses were not included in the results. The twelve elderly participants completed all sessions, both questionnaires, and the follow-up interview.

Published Work in the Field and This Project

The central focus of the study was to identify and mitigate spiritual gaps among the elderly in resident communities that come from different denominational backgrounds. The precedent literature was not specific and did not approach this focus with adequate specificity. Barna's 2016 work published in *The Bible in America* was pivotal in creating the instrument and in comparing generational differences between Elders, Boomers and Millennials.¹⁴⁸ The appreciation and

¹⁴⁸ Barna, *The Bible in America*, 96.

motivation for helping the elderly know a deeper spiritual life was studied and revealed best by Harris. He pointed out the biblical examples such as Jethro, Moses, Joshua, Caleb and Barzillai as having an interest in growing in knowledge and spirit.¹⁴⁹ These men and others have broken through the obstacles of aging and dedicated themselves to a “type of discipline,” says Harris, “which they may acquire the wisdom of the ages.”¹⁵⁰ This is important for the researcher and the residents to understand that learning and growing intellectually for the elderly is not unprecedented but is seen throughout the biblical narrative.

Hoskinson provided fair coverage of the important topic of assurance of salvation by disseminating the differences between the present only, time of conversion, and composite view.¹⁵¹ The researcher agreed with the composite view that believers in Christ can enjoy present assurance of salvation through the person, promises, and work of Jesus.¹⁵² As Hoskinson differentiated that the believer must exhibit a perseverance of faith through obedience to demonstrate this authentic faith and conversion, the researcher likewise used that explanation to the participants when explaining this concept.¹⁵³

Denominational differences and practices were addressed throughout the teaching sessions as well as during the group informational session. Richard Bennett, a former Catholic priest, provided depth to understanding the Catholic Catechism and how it has informed Catholics, the Catholics in this study notwithstanding. The main point to navigate for the participating Catholics in the study was reconciling 2 Timothy 3:16–17 with paragraph 82 of the Catechism: “the Roman

¹⁴⁹ Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 158.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

¹⁵¹ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, 208–10.

¹⁵² Ibid, 210.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Catholic Church ... does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and tradition ... must be equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”¹⁵⁴ The sensitivity to the participants and their denominational heritage was considered very important in preparing lessons for the study. The two that marked “other” as for their denomination were both Lutheran and thought it fit to put “other” rather than not have their denomination recognized as the “Catholic” distinction was made. This consideration was important and was informed by the literature, but not so that differences could be studied. The researcher used the literature to inform as to the sensitivity of teaching lessons and the anticipation of questions received from the Catholic participants.

A representative of Generation X, the researcher understood that a voice from the Elder generation was necessary for the literature to adequately inform in the area of motivating an elderly group to pursue a stirring of their heart for God’s purpose. The writing of Dr. George Sweeting was chosen by the researcher as “Doc” has been a personal mentor and colleague for many years. This member of the Elder generation is currently authoring another book and has written extensively about aging during the past two decades. In his book, *The Joys of Successful Aging*, Sweeting relates stories of death by Francis of Assisi and William Blake that demonstrated lives well lived by living for Jesus.¹⁵⁵ These stories were related to the participants, which helped discuss death candidly, but with hope and anticipation of Christians that were preparing for it. Many of the deeper discussions concerning death occurred during the private follow-up interviews.

The precedent literature was effective in informing of the separate components that went into the focus of the study. The researcher realized a gap in the literature in placing these elements

¹⁵⁴ Bennett, *Catholicism: East of Eden*, 319.

¹⁵⁵ Sweeting, *The Joys of Successful Aging*, 120–21.

together specifically addressing elderly resident communities and their use of in-house spiritual care by campus pastors. The literature may not have caught up with the phenomenon of planned elderly communities versus retirement communities of the past. The elderly represented in this study averaged more than eighty-five years of age and the literature largely addressed this group by their mental and physical needs rather than their spiritual preparation for death. Still, with the use of precedent literature and supporting scriptures, this study has concluded that the elderly have spiritual gaps, these gaps can be mitigated, and elderly can be equipped with biblical truth for end-of-life issues.

Practices and Processes Learned

The majority of the participants were familiar with “childhood” stories of the Bible through Catholic Catechism or Protestant Sunday school lessons. Those stories included Noah, David and Goliath, Moses and Egypt, and Jesus’ birth and crucifixion. The researcher presumed a more basic knowledge among the participants, so the teaching content of lessons reflected this. The researcher believed that a preponderance of the group was unaware of most key points presented and, therefore, they wished to learn more. While the intervention questionnaire was basic and reduced to its simplest form, it seemed to correctly predict the gaps in biblical knowledge among the participants. Even though some answered the survey Bible questions correctly, the group affirmed its lack of perception of biblical truth and the interrelatedness of Old Testament prophetic Scripture and the advent of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The researcher also learned that the participants did not understand the presence of Jesus in the Old Testament writings and were interested in connecting scriptures together.

The follow-up interviews provided insight into the minds of the elderly when considering entering into the study. One participant explained the absence of her colleagues at the information

session by stating that “they may have thought they would have to know the Bible and they did not want to be embarrassed by not knowing it so they did not come even though you provided food and prizes.” Breaking through that apprehension to build a group and study the Bible together is a difficult task for the campus pastor of the elderly. The diminished faculties of some elderly to see, hear, recall, and pay attention to the spoken voice are challenges for them to consider participating.

The campus pastor had not previously utilized the camera and video technology in the chapel to broadcast the weekly worship services to the rooms of residents. The goal of the facility was to have many residents interacting with one another in person; therefore, the projection of the service was not promoted. Directly following the completion of the study, the COVID-19 influenza pandemic began worldwide. It was then that the video technology within the facility was tested and utilized to develop the spiritual life of residents as gathering them was prohibited during the state’s “stay at home” order. This technology could be utilized in the future as the initial group meeting and information session for residents. If they had been curious or apprehensive about coming to a group previously, the privacy that the technology allows would give them another option. The researcher plans to implement this option the next time that the study is conducted.

Effectiveness of the Project

The response of the residents indicated that they had received more specific information and answers than they expected; in that regard the project was very successful. The intervention questionnaire was predictive in its function to gauge possible Bible illiteracy and fear of death or misconception of salvation.

The format of eating a dinner together and discussing the Bible and related topics was well-received by all the participants. The administration of the facility thought highly enough of the potential impact of the project to fund the dinners, which allowed a meal format to continue over

three weeks for twelve individuals. The cost of dinners was a sizeable investment but appeared to be crucial in the persistence of the participants and the comfort that they had during the event. A three-course dinner, served at the table, surrounded by some familiar and other unfamiliar neighbors intrigued the participants and appeared to put them at ease to ask questions. This element would be difficult to replicate routinely as only two of the residents had meals included (they were in assisted living and had a meal plan) while the rest would have had to pay for each meal themselves. Of this group, half regularly ate dinner and paid for meals and the other half did not. The meals were welcome in that they were compensation but also the residents knew what table they would be at and had a reserved seat at the particular table, which they regarded as important.

Tracking of the questions asked indicated that the group felt increasingly more comfortable in the setting with one another. They were also less intimidated by lack of knowledge of the subject; as one resident commented, “I guess my granddaughter probably knows more Bible than I do.” These self-deprecating comments notwithstanding, the project was successful in gathering elderly residents and addressing some of the most crucial spiritual concerns they face. The project would have been best served by the original plan to utilize two weeks for each topic; unfortunately, the cost of dinners for the number of people and sessions was prohibitive.

Limitations

While the researcher had open access to the residents and the campus, each resident used a different means of communication. Some residents had cell phones and were adept at texting, while others were not. A few preferred a note or invitation that they would tape to their cabinet in the kitchen, while others relied on a reminder call at their residence to attend the next session.

The private dining area was actually the assisted living dining area that was not being used due to the fact that, in this particular facility, only a portion of the assisted living apartments had

residents so all residents ate dinner in the main dining area. Future studies would have to limit the group size or choose another area to have the program. The waitstaff was taxed by utilizing two additional workers to serve the study group. Most likely, this study would need to be reproduced without the meal component, potentially leading to fewer participants or a decrease in persistence of the participants.

The hypothesis measured the perceived effect of a three-session teaching intervention upon elderly residents. The initial impact was proved through the study results but was limited in that practice or performance of faith was not measured. For example, a more extensive study might find that the researcher would help the participants determine what to do with their change in perception to one of the three issues.

The brevity of the questionnaire and the re-introduction of it at the end of three weeks could have some observers considering that the participants simply learned the correct answers and put them on the new questionnaire. This may be true of other groups, but this group remarked that the questionnaire was familiar but it seems that no one memorized the answers from the time it was introduced. Similar, but unique, questions could have been introduced to represent the three categories for the second questionnaire, but that would have required sophisticated and precise planning that was not introduced. The familiarity of re-introducing the questionnaire seemed to alleviate more apprehension, so it will be a part of future processes for this project.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher chose the three categories of spiritual gaps based on conversations with residents and literature that was read. It may be advisable to allow a group of residents to choose the areas of interest based on a list or inventory. This might lead to affirming presumptions made or to detailing emerging areas of spiritual interests for a changing age group.

The presentation of salvation through faith is straightforward. However, the researcher learned through the literature and work on this subject that the question, “What does a saved Christian look like?” is more difficult to answer but is also of great interest to the participants. A more extensive teaching on biblical grace and how to understand the good works that believers do, as a result and in evidence of being saved through Christ, would be an interesting topic for interdenominational groups.

It may be beneficial in future research to address one denomination at a time and address the needs of that particular group. This may also be done using a collaborative team approach whereby the campus pastor enlists the assistance of a minister from the denomination being assisted. This idea may resonate well with residents in the elderly facility as many have been attached to their denominations and might feel comfortable knowing that a priest or minister that shares their background is participating in the project. This format would allow for more specific questions to be addressed such as, “Is idolatry a problem for persons in residence living, and are practices worshiped rather than God?” There would have to be compatibility among the instructors to accomplish this partnership.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects following the study, the vehicle for delivering the program may be modified to include video transmission of the lessons and the general information session. As elderly residences come back to a “new normal” in terms of gathering numbers in close proximity, other researchers may wish to deliver the program live and with options for video feed to the resident rooms. This may allow for limited ambulatory or assisted living residents to participate in the study. The informational gathering may also be suited to video delivery. As of the summer of 2020, none of the elderly facilities would be allowed to gather numbers of residents in groups of more than ten, so the urgency of beginning a program to illustrate

the understanding for salvation would need to happen with alternate methods of delivery. The research may falter with modified methods if technology is not adequate and with the understanding that group interaction would be limited to teaching and questions collected each week rather than live interaction via technology such as Zoom meetings. Studies show that only 17 percent of those over eighty years old have smart phones, so utilizing this type of technology would be a challenge.¹⁵⁶ Although older adults are becoming more tech savvy, the goal of resident communities is to facilitate interaction between the residents to build community, so separating the residents into their individual rooms runs contrary to this goal. Future research plans may provide for new technology or simply a rotation of residents to the teaching sessions so that each has an opportunity to receive live teaching and the interaction with their peers.

It is recommended that the researcher develop an alternate delivery plan to provide residents with this program if some health emergency or other event prevents the gathering of numbers of residents in one group. It would also benefit the researcher to deliver the program to those residents selected but unable to attend a given teaching session due to a temporary health condition or set-back.

Implementation

The researcher recommends that the project be implemented throughout the campuses of the organization so that gaps are identified and addressed by each campus pastor in every location. The campus pastors meet regularly as a group and this project could be an annual agenda item to address and discuss the results with residents at the facilities located within the different regions.

¹⁵⁶ Monica Anderson and Andrew Perrin, "Technology Use among Seniors," *Pew Research Study*, May 17, 2017.

Pilot groups at each residence would have the benefit of offering dinners to the participants at no cost to the group. This would require advanced planning and would have budget implications for each year. The regional directors would need to be approached by the campus pastors to advocate for the inclusion of funds at each facility in the amount of \$500 annually to provide for the meals.

Before the implementation of new groups, the researcher would need to develop a Spiritual Gap Workshop handbook so that the campus pastors could complete the training with some consistency. Three to five campus pastors may be selected to refine and produce a training manual that would include instructions, question prompts, scriptures, and videos. The instructors may decide to utilize technology to broadcast a teaching session from one of the pastors at a specific location that all could view as part of the training. In this manner, campus pastors might share the burden of teaching or be able to prepare one lesson as a specialty and not be greatly taxed by the assignment.

To understand the best group dynamic, the researcher might experiment by providing sessions just for women and for men to facilitate discussion that is more pertinent to those genders. Likewise, since this study has demonstrated that Catholic residents have a different understanding of some biblical concepts such as “born again,” “salvation,” and their understanding of the practice of sacraments such as healing, initiation, and service, certain spiritual concepts may be able to be illustrated better to that specific group.

Furthermore, if the researcher finds that the residents seem to grasp the concept of trust in God, this section may be eliminated in favor of expanding the other two teaching sections or adding a new section to reveal biblical trust connected to understanding biblical truth and certainty of salvation such as the significance and practice of following Jesus Christ.

Thesis Restatement

The elderly in denominationally diverse residence communities verbally affirm their spiritual growth in the areas of biblical understanding, trusting in God, and certainty of salvation after receiving training by the campus pastor.

Conclusion

The study was born from one individual expressing her doubts about her faith and God's love for her. From there a process began to construct a project to address her concern and the concerns that others living around her have about the most important issues of life and death. The problem addressed in chapter 1 is more specific than the gap that some may experience from a lack of understanding of the Bible, trust in God, and certainty of salvation. It is, more specifically, considering the trials that come with aging, loss of a spouse, degradation of the physical body, and weariness of mind, how might one, at this point in their life, address the spiritual gaps that are encountered?

The literature was found to be robust and agreeable in that the obstacles of the elderly are not in dispute and are cited by observers and those living through old age. The beauty and potential with which the Bible speaks of the elderly in such passages describing Job, Samuel, Moses, Nicodemus and others provide moments to pause and consider the great value of older lives. Furthermore, this elderly resident facility's mission connects to this truth. Indeed, God was honored by the subject matter and the persistence of those completing the study. As the theory met this theological reflection, research revealed that older adults know more biblical truth but they are declining as is the entire population. The theory provided clues to the work completed and yet to be done that would connect the spiritual gaps people have with the deficiencies the elderly face to learning new truth of God and applying it to their lives.

This project's methodology included a group of dedicated residents and the partnership with an elderly resident facility that wanted to invest in the lives of its people. The over-emphasis on communication and the choice of written and verbal instructions were necessary to the success of this project. It prompted the consideration of doing even more to ensure that elderly residents might have an opportunity to learn of a general session through a robocall (not utilized in this study) and personal communication so that few would be left out of participation if they had desired it. In consideration of measuring change, the researcher understood the imperfection of using a brief questionnaire weighed against the interest and ability of elderly residents to complete a more complex instrument. In the end, it was demonstrated that gathering a group together and discussing faith-related subjects of interest would reveal the more specific gaps in understanding and belief. The literature was also lacking with regard to how to teach adults the Bible in a group setting of elderly residents from different denominations. Some assumptions were generally made that older adults come with more understanding, but that presumption is flawed and complicated because, while older adults may have some biblical knowledge, sorting the details of that knowledge into truth and non-truth can take more thought than simply explaining truth.

Finally, the results were revealed and the study affirmed that teaching of truth to the elderly resulted in a positive effect of "examining themselves to see whether they are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5–6). The study could have included a longer period of teaching to improve the knowledge of the participants. The cost of meals and ability of the residents to persist and complete the study necessitated a three-session format with a follow-up. The study began with one person's sincere concern and blossomed to include a vibrant group that completed the task, largely learning more about God and his love for them. One, in particular, was able to complete her story: Those familiar beeps came back as the shiny red scooter buzzed a circle in the foyer of the residence.

Grace, not afraid to express her sentiments to anyone else that would care to listen, addressed the campus pastor and said, “I’m not worried any more about dying and what will happen after I die. The Holy Spirit has showed me that I ‘will fear no evil’ and even though every day might not be perfect, I know God accepts me and this project helped me to know it.”

Psalm 92:14 commends the aged by stating, “They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.” The elderly are a precious resource to the Kingdom of God and they can be vibrant and continue to develop their faith until death parts them from this world. Campus pastors are integral conduits to helping the aged reach maturity of faith and gently press toward the boundaries and limits of God’s purpose for their lives in the sunset of their days. As the oldest generation among God’s people emerges to find Him, the younger generations will take notice and be compelled to worship the Lord their God with greater fervor and awe.

Bibliography

- Administration for Community Living. 2017 Profile of Older Americans.* Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, April 2018.
- Anderson, Monica, and Andrew Perrin. "Technology Use among Seniors." *Pew Research Study*, May 17, 2017.
- Barna, George. *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement.* Ventura: The Barna Group, 2016.
- Beal, Timothy. *Biblical Literacy: The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010.
- Beckler, Ernest. *The Denial of Death.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.
- Beeke, Joel R., and Paul Smalley. "Assurance of Salvation: The Insights of Anthony Burgess." *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 2 (2014): 171–84.
- Bennett, Richard. *Catholicism: East of Eden: Insights into Catholicism for the 21st Century.* Carlisle: Berean Beacon Press, 2010.
- Berding, Kenneth. *Bible Revival: Recommitting Ourselves to One Book.* Wooster: Weaver Book, 2013.
- Beswick, A. D., K. Rees, P. Dieppe, S. Ayis, R. Gooberman-Hill, J. Horwood, and S. Ebrahim. "Complex interventions to improve physical function and maintain independent living in elderly people: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *The Lancet* 371, no. 9614 (2008): 725–35. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)60342-6](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60342-6).
- Bidwell, Duane. *When Religion Isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People.* Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2018.
- Binz, Stephen. *Introduction to the Bible: A Catholic Guide to Studying Scripture.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017.
- Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Bridges, Jerry. *Trusting God.* Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2016.
- Caldwell, Connie Ast. "Addressing Biblical Illiteracy: A Response to a Growing Concern in the Christian Church." DMin thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2012.
- Calvin, John. *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life.* Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2004.
- Cannister, Mark. *Teenagers Matter: Making Student Ministry a Priority in the Church.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

- Carder, P., J Kohon, M. B. Neal, and A. Zimam. "Characteristics of Assisted Living, Residential Care, and Memory Care Residents in Oregon." *The Gerontologist* 55, no. Suppl_2 (November 2015): 39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv327.04>.
- Carrion, Patrick M. "The Scared and the Sacred: Pushing Past Fear that Often Leads to Amazing Rewards." *Priest* 75, no. 4 (April 2019): 34–35.
- Chappell, Timothy. "The Fear of Death." *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1028 (July 2009): 413–23.
- Chase, Jessica. "The Religious Beliefs and Behaviors of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials: Are There Still Gender Differences?" PhD diss., University of Central Florida, 2016.
- Chin, Kelvin. *Overcoming the Fear of Death: Through Each of the 4 Main Belief Systems*. Austin, TX: Aurelian, 2017.
- Christensen, K., G. Doblhammer, R. Rau, and J. W. Vaupel. "Ageing Populations: The Challenges Ahead." *Lancet* 374, no. 9696, 1196–1208. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)61460-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61460-4).
- Clinton, Tim, and Ron Hawkins. *The Quick Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- Coleman, Curtis. *Why Fear Death? The Bible and Science Answer the Question, "What Happens When We Die?"* Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017.
- Covey, Stephen M. R. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.
- Cox, Claude. "Twenty Years of Teaching Bible Study in a Long-term Care Facility." *Restoration Quarterly* 48 (2006): 103–12.
- Cranney, Stephen, Joseph Leman, Thomas A. Fergus, and Wade C. Rowatt. "Hell Anxiety as Non-pathological Fear." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 21, no. 9–10 (2018): 867–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2018.1443436>
- de Witte, Pieter. *Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference : To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Dickson Hollow of Presbyterian Homes and Services. *Census of Residents*. May 2019.
- Doane, Peter. *Encounter Jesus: Transforming Catholic Culture in Crisis*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019.
- Dreher, Rod. *The Benedict Option: Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. New York: Random House, 2017.
- Driesbach, Daniel. *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism*. West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2015.

- Eckert, Kevin. *Inside Assisted Living the Search for Home*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Ellicott, Charles. *Ellicott's Bible Commentary for English Readers*. Volume 1. Harrington, DE: Delmarva Publications, 2015.
- Enns, Peter. *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires our Trust More than our "Correct" Beliefs*. New York: HarperOne, 2016.
- Fraunfelder, Frederick, and James Gilbaugh. *Retirement Rx: The Retirement Docs' Prescription for Living a Happy, Fulfilling, Rest of Your Life*. New York: Penguin Group, 2008.
- Gilbert, Greg. *What Is the Gospel?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010.
- Gleason, Scott A. "Sufficiency of Scripture: A Formulation of the Definition of Scripture's Sufficiency with Application to Biblical Counseling." PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012.
- Gregersen, N. H., and J. Henricksen. "Sola Scriptura: The Inclusive Principle." *Dialog* 55, no. 3 (2016): 184–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12252>.
- Gron, Arne. *The Concept of Anxiety in Søren Kierkegaard*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Christian Beliefs: 20 Basics Every Christian Should Know*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- . *Free Grace Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016.
- Gulley, Phillip. *If the Church Were Christian: Uncovering the Values of Jesus*. New York: Harper Collins, 2010.
- Ham, Ken, and Bodie Hodge. *How Do We Know the Bible Is True?* Vol. 1. Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing, 2011.
- . *How Do We Know the Bible Is True?* Vol. 2. Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012.
- Harris, Charles. *Factbook on Aging: A Profile of America's Older Population*. Washington, D.C.: National Council on Aging, 1978.
- Harris, V. Gordon. *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Hasel, G. F. "Biblical Theology Movement." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., edited by Walter Elwell, [insert page number here]. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001.
- Hieronymi, Pamela. "The Reasons of Trust." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 2 (2008): 213–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400801886496>.

- High, D. M., and M. M. Doole. "Ethical and Legal Issues in Conducting Research Involving Elderly Subjects." *Behavioral Sciences & The Law* 13, no. 3 (1995): 319–35.
- Hill, Terrence D., Jacqueline L. Angel, Christopher G. Ellison, and Ronald J. Angel. "Religious Attendance and Mortality: An 8-Year Follow-Up of Older Mexican Americans." *Journals of Gerontology* 60, no. 2 (2005): 102–9. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/60.2.s102>.
- Hoskinson, Matthew. *Assurance of Salvation: Implications of a New Testament Theology of Hope*. Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2010.
- Iwarsson, Susanne, Hans-Werner Wahl, Carita Nygren, Frank Oswald, Andrew Sixsmith, Judith Sixsmith, Zsuzsa Széman, and Signe Tomson. "Importance of the Home Environment for Healthy Aging: Conceptual and Methodological Background of the European ENABLE–AGE Project." *The Gerontologist* 47, no. 1 (February 2007): 78–84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/47.1.78>.
- Jacoby, Susan. *Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*. New York: Pantheon, 2011.
- Jennings, C. G., T. M. MacDonald, L. Wei, M. J. Brown, L. McConnachie, and I. S. Mackenzie. "Does Offering an Incentive Payment Improve Recruitment to Clinical Trials and Increase the Proportion of Socially Deprived and Elderly Participants?" *Trials* 16, no. 80 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-015-0582-8>.
- Kerbler, Boštjan, Richard Sendi, and Maša Filipovič Hrast. "The Relationship of the Elderly toward Their Home And Living Environment." *Urbani Izziv* 28, no. 2 (2017):96–109. <https://doi.org/10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2017-28-02-002>.
- Krauss, Neal. "Religious Meaning and Subjective Well-Being in Late Life." *Journal of Gerontology* 58B, no. 3 (2003): 160–70.
- Kwon, Sae D. "Reducing the Crisis of the Elderly by Means of Bible Study." DMin thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2004.
- Lacorne, Dennis. *Religion in America: A Political History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Leahy, Robert. "The Decline of Trust: Why Are We Losing Confidence in Each Other?" *Psychology Today*, October 18, 2016.
- Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Harper One, 1980.
- Mailberger, P. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament XI*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Martinson, Marty, and Clara Berridge. "Successful Aging and Its Discontents: A Systematic Review of the Social Gerontology Literature." *The Gerontologist* 55, no. 1 (2015): 58.

- Mercado M. L. “‘Have You Ever Read?’ Imagining Women, Bibles, and Religious Print in Nineteenth-Century America.” *US Catholic Historian* 31, no. 3 (2013):1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cht.2013.0023>.
- Merritt, J. “Asking the Clergy: What Is Your Definition of Heaven?” *Newsday*, January 30, 2016.
- Millar, Gary. *Need to Know: Your Guide to the Christian Life*. Surrey, UK: The Good Book Co., 2011.
- Mueller, Steve. *The Seeker’s Guide to Reading the Bible: A Catholic View*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1979.
- Ngien, Dennis. “Picture Christ: Martin Luther’s Advice on Preparing to Die,” *Christianity Today*, April 12, 2007. Accessed January 19, 2020. <https://christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/april/34.67.html>.
- O’Brien, Glen. “John Wesley, the Uniting Church, and the Authority of Scripture.” *Pacifica* 27, no. 2 (2014): 170–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1030570X14544926>.
- O’Keefe, M. *American Catholic Bishops and the Politics of Scandal*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429019746>.
- Parson, Laurie J. “Impacting Depression in Homebound Elderly.” *Journal of Christian Nursing : A Quarterly Publication of Nurses Christian Fellowship* 36, no. 2 (2019): 96– 103. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000593>.
- Pawar, Sheela. *Trusting Others, Trusting God : Concepts of Belief, Faith and Rationality*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2016.
- Pell, George. *God and Caesar: Selected Essays on Religion, Politics & Society*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007.
- Pew Research Center. “Adults under 40 Are Less Likely to be Religiously Affiliated.” In *The Age Gap in Religion around the World* (June 13, 2018). <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/young-adults-around-the-world-are-less-religious-by-several-measures/>.
- . “Religious Landscape Study.” May 30, 2014. Accessed August 24, 2019. https://www.pewforum.org/wp.content/uploads/sites/7/2015/11/201.11.03_rls_ii_questionnaire.pdf.
- Pramesona, Bayu Anggileo, and Surasak Taneepanichskul. “The Effect of Religious Intervention on Depressive Symptoms and Quality of Life among Indonesian Elderly in Nursing Homes: A Quasi-Experimental Study.” *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 13 (2018): 473–83.
- Presbyterian Homes and Services. *Rise Up: 2018 Annual Report*. January 2019.
- Presbyterian Homes, Spiritual Care and Programs. “Biblical Framework,” *Ministry Guide*. 2018.

- Provencher, Véronique, W. Ben Mortenson, Laurence Tanguay-Garneau, Karine Bélanger, and Marion Dagenais. "Challenges and Strategies Pertaining to Recruitment and Retention of Frail Elderly in Research Studies: A Systematic Review." *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 59, no. 1 (2014): 18.
- Raith, C., II. (2017). *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Guides for the Perplexed. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567661845>.
- [Redacted]. "Campus Pastor Position Description." *Responsibilities and Commitment*. Revised May 2018.
- [Redacted]. *Census of Residents*. April 2019.
- Reese, Thomas. "The Hidden Exodus: Catholics Becoming Protestants." *National Catholic Reporter*, April 18, 2011.
- Religions List: Independent, Assisted and Memory Care, Presbyterian Homes and Services, Region 4, accessed May 16, 2019.
- Rhodes, Ron. *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2015.
- Roberts, Andrew, Stella Ogunwole, Laura Blakeslee, and Megan Rabe. "A Snapshot of the Fast-Growing U.S. Older Population." United States Census Bureau, October 30, 2018. Accessed September 24, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/10/snapshot-fast-growing-us-older-population.html>.
- Rockwell, Sam. "Denominational Identity and Ministerial Identity Congruence within the Foursquare Church." PhD diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2013.
- Rogers, Adrian. *Blessed Assurance: A Know-So Salvation*. Memphis: Love Worth Finding Ministries, 2005.
- . *What Every Christian Ought to Know*. Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2017.
- Roper Center. "Paradise Polled: Americans and the Afterlife." Cornell University, 2020. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/paradise-polled-americans-and-afterlife>
- Rosch, Erica M. *A Field Guide to Sheepshead*. Oregon, WI: Badger Books, 2001.
- Schupper, Robin. "Could Changing Our Definition of 'Elderly' Positively Impact Higher Education?" *Journal of Online Higher Education* 1, no. 3 (2017). <https://doaj.org/article/684e700d32e242e39d49f44ef0aaf8f>
- Stagg, Frank. *The Bible Speaks on Aging*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981.
- Stanglin, Keith D. *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609*. Brill's Series in Church History 27. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

- Stanley, Andy. *Since Nobody's Perfect: How Good is Good Enough?* New York: Multnomah, 2009.
- Stanley, Charles. *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* Nashville: Nelson, 2002.
- Stenberg, Mark, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Joel Hodgson. *51% Christian: Finding Faith after Certainty*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt155j3kn>.
- Stetzer, Ed. "Dumb and Dumber: How Biblical Illiteracy is Killing Our Nation." *Charisma Magazine*, October 2014.
- Storms, Samuel. *Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015.
- Stott, John. *Issues Facing Christians Today*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- . *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007.
- Stowell, Joseph. *Following Christ: Experiencing Life the Way It Was Meant to Be*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Sweat, Mary T. "What Are the Gaps in Spiritual Care?" *Journal of Christian Nursing : A Quarterly Publication of Nurses Christian Fellowship* 28, no. 2 (2011): 112.
- Sweeting, Don, and George Sweeting. *How to Finish the Christian Life: Following Jesus in the Second Half*. Chicago: Moody, 2012.
- Sweeting, George. *How to Begin the Christian Life*. Chicago: Moody, 1996.
- . *The Joys of Successful Aging*. Chicago: Moody, 2002.
- Swindoll, Charles, and Roy B. Zuck, Eds. *Understanding Christian Theology*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Throop, John. "Learning Methods and Biblical Engagement." *Clergy Journal* 84, no. 5 (2008): 16–17.
- Towns, Elmer L. *How to Create and Present High-Impact Bible Studies*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998. http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/towns_books/27.
- van Halperen, Maria, Wichert ten Have, Ben Kiernan, Martin Mennecke, Ugur Üngör, and Ton Zwaan. *The Holocaust and Other Genocides: An Introduction*. NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012.
- Waltke, Bruce. *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15–31*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Walvoord, John. *Every Prophecy about Jesus*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2016.

- Waterhouse, Steven W. *Blessed Assurance: A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Security*. Amarillo, TX: Westcliff, 2000.
- Wendel, Richard G. *Retire with a Mission: Planning and Purpose for the Second Half of Life*. Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2008.
- Werrell, Ralph. *The Roots of William Tyndale's Theology*. Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2013.
- Westminster Assembly. "Chapter 1." Westminster Confession of Faith. 1646.
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster3.i.i.html>.
- Wink, P., and J. Scott. "Does Religiousness Buffer against the Fear of Death and Dying in Late Adulthood? Findings from a Longitudinal Study." *Journals of Gerontology* 60, no. 4 (2005): 207–14.
- Wolff, François-Charles. "Well-Being of Elderly People Living in Nursing Homes: The Benefits of Making Friends." *Kyklos: International Review for Social Sciences*, 66, no. 1 (2013): 153–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.12015>.
- Yount, William. *Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher's Introduction to Educational Psychology*. Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010.
- Zabriskie, Marek. *Doing the Bible Better: The Bible Challenge and the Transformation of the Episcopal Church*. New York: Church Publishing, 2014.

Appendix A: Pre-Questionnaire

The Certainty Questionnaire

_____ ref number

Name:

Age:

Church Background: Catholic Protestant Other None

1. I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God that has no errors?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

2. What is the name of the first book of the Bible? _____

3. When we say "John 3:16," what does the "3" refer to? _____

4. Circle the phrase that comes directly from the Bible:

- The truth will set you free
- To thine own self be true
- God helps those who help themselves

5. I believe that the Bible's informing of Jesus being God, sacrificing his life on the cross, and all the miracles attributed to him were true:

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

6. Circle the phrase that answers how someone gets to heaven.

- If you are good enough, since God is loving, you will go to heaven
- No one can know for certain
- Confession and belief that Jesus is the Savior of world and true sacrifice for our sin

7. I fear death.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

8. I am going to heaven after I die.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

Appendix B: Post-Questionnaire

The Certainty Questionnaire: Second Glance

ID: _____

1. I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God that has no errors?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure _____

2. What is the name of the first book of the Bible? _____

3. When we say “John 3:16,” what does the “3” refer to? _____

4. Circle the phrase that comes directly from the Bible:

- The truth will set you free
- To thine own self be true
- God helps those who help themselves

5. I believe that the Bible’s informing of Jesus being God, sacrificing his life on the cross, and all the miracles attributed to him were true:

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

6. Circle the phrase that answers how someone gets to heaven.

- If you are good enough, since God is loving, you will go to heaven
- No one can know for certain
- Confession and belief that Jesus is the Savior of world and true sacrifice for our sin

7. I fear death.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

8. I am going to heaven after I die.

Yes _____ No _____ Uncertain _____

These sessions helped me to better understand:

_____ The Bible _____ Trust in God _____ Salvation

Appendix C: Site Approvals
Request for Subject Testing in Facility

December 1, 2019

██████████
Regional Director of Wisconsin

Dear ██████████:

As a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. The title of my research project is **Examining Biblical Certainty of Salvation Among Elderly Residents of [Redacted]** and the purpose of my research is to be better equipped as a campus pastor to explain and assist residents with biblical questions of death and salvation.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in/at the ██████████
██████████ and also to request the participation of the residents within the facility.

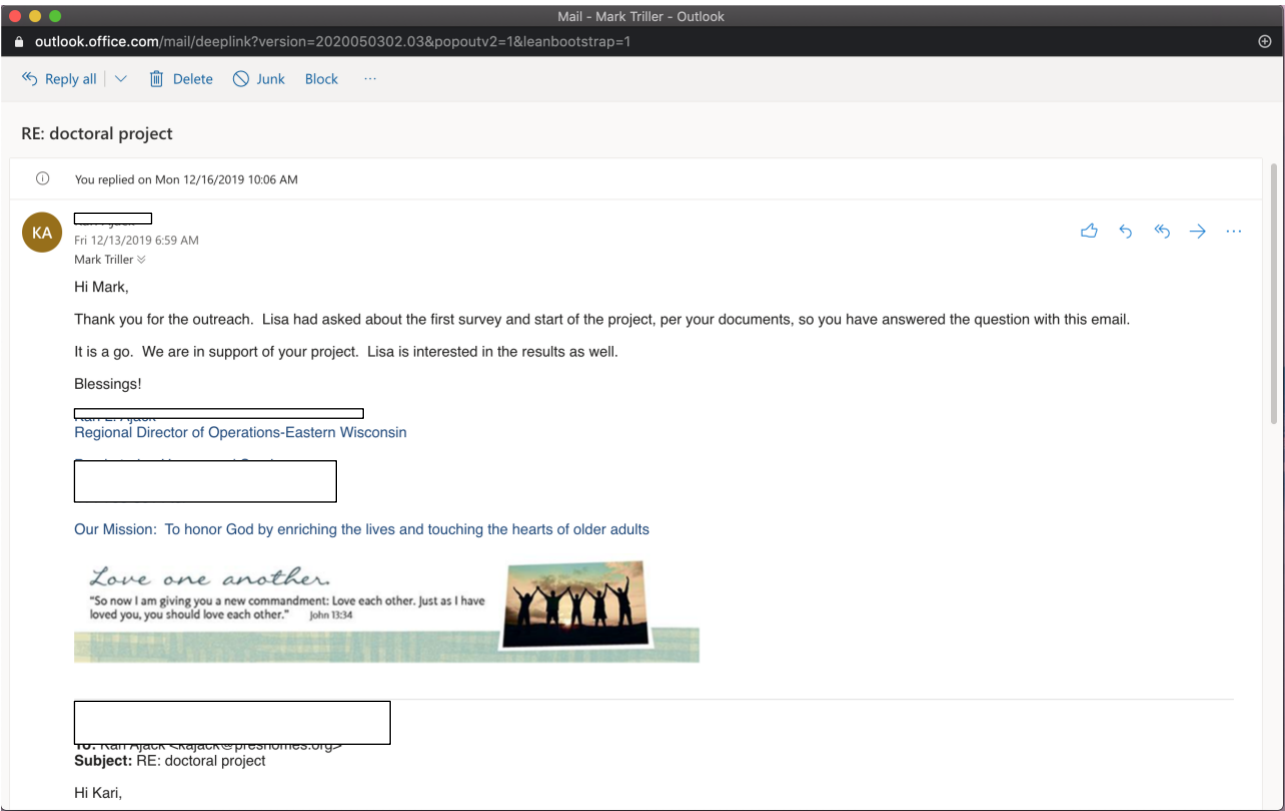
Participants will be provided with a brief survey to complete and a select group will be asked to review the sermons that relate to a six-week series on the certainty of God, the Bible and Heaven. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to ██████████.

Sincerely,

Mark Triller
Campus Pastor

Site Approval Confirmation



Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Examining Biblical Certainty of Salvation Among Elderly Residents of Presbyterian Homes and Services in Wisconsin

Mark Triller
Liberty University
School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study of residents and their biblical understanding of key concepts from the faith including death, heaven, and salvation. You were selected as a possible participant because you reside at [REDACTED], may be uncertain in some of the areas being reviewed, and have an interest in spiritual life. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Mark Triller, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to determine if selected residents of [REDACTED] can move from uncertainty to certainty in the areas of not fearing death and their future salvation.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Attend an information session where the questionnaire will be distributed for completion. This eight-item questionnaire will take 10 minutes to complete and the explanation of the project will take another 30 minutes.
2. If you are chosen to participate in the further study, you will agree to attend six consecutive Thursday worship services that last 30 minutes each.
3. In addition, you are requested to join the group for a dinner during three Monday evenings where the group will discuss the previous two sermon messages. Your dinner will be at [REDACTED] and will be at no cost to you.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.”

Benefits: [

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are a more informed biblical understanding of life’s greatest questions related to heaven. Participants will also be part of a group and will get to know the others better from this group of fifteen participants.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Those attending the initial information meeting will be entered in a drawing to win one of three door prizes valued at \$20 each. Those selected and that participate as one of the fifteen select will receive three complimentary dinners on Monday in the [REDACTED] dining room.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The results of the Certainty Questionnaire will be known only to the researcher. These records will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.]
- The Follow-up dinner discussion will be audio-only recorded to receive notes and feedback to be included in the finding. The audio recordings will be erased promptly following the notes being transcribed.
- I cannot assure that members of the select fifteen will not share the discussion of the follow-up dinners.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: None noted

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Presbyterian Homes and Services. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Mark Triller. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Daphne Washington, at dWASHINGTON4@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

— The researcher has my permission to audio-record me during the group follow-up session when I am in a group setting as part of my participation in this study.

_____ Signature of Participant	_____ Date
_____ Signature of Investigator	_____ Date

Appendix E: Recruitment Documents

Recruitment Flyer

Examining Biblical Certainty of Salvation Among the Elderly in Interdenominational Resident Communities

- Have you gone to church for years but believed that you wanted to know more about the Bible?
 - Would you be interested to know what God says about Himself?
- Is the thought of heaven too much of a mystery that seems too difficult to understand?

If you answered **yes** to any of these questions and you are an independent living resident of [REDACTED], you may be eligible to participate in a spiritual research study.

The purpose of this research study is to compare the effectiveness of biblical teaching in three specific areas: God, the Bible, and Heaven. Participants will be asked to attend an information session (30 minutes), take a brief initial questionnaire that asks for responses to biblical questions and their beliefs about heaven (10 minutes). Eight to ten participants will be asked to participate in 3 small group sessions over dinner on 3 Monday nights that will address each of the three areas (45 minutes each). This smaller group would also complete the same questionnaire upon completion of the 3 sessions taught (10 minutes). In addition, they will be asked to complete a follow-up interview (30 minutes).

Compensation will include an opportunity to win one of five prizes valued at \$20 each during the initial meeting and three delicious free dinners served at [REDACTED] dining facility. Participants, as a benefit, will also have an opportunity to know others better and receive individual and small group mentoring from the Campus Pastor.

The study, which begins with an information session of February 16, 2020, is conducted at



Germantown Pastor Mark Triller, a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, **Please contact Mark Triller at [REDACTED] or mvtriller@liberty.edu for more information, WI 53022**

Recruitment Letter

January 30, 2020

Dear Resident of [REDACTED]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to determine the understanding of [REDACTED] residents in the areas of certainty of God, the Bible and Heaven. This is important to me as I am the Campus Pastor that will try to provide activities and opportunities for residents that will address the most pressing issues for their spiritual lives in a manner that they can receive and grow in faith, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a resident of [REDACTED] and are willing to participate you will be asked to attend a group gathering during which a questionnaire will be distributed. Each attendee will be asked to listen to the presentation describing the study and then complete the questionnaire. It should take approximately 30 minutes for the presentation and another 10 minutes for the questionnaire. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate you would simply attend the Information Session on February 16, 2020 at 6 PM. The study will be explained in greater detail and the process for selecting a small group to participate in the next phase of the study will be explained as well.

A consent document is attached to this invitation. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the Information Session on February 16.

If you choose to participate, you will be entered in a raffle to receive one of five prizes valued at \$20 if you complete the questionnaire. Those selected for the second phase will receive three complementary dinners at the [REDACTED] dining room.

Sincerely,

Rev. Mark Triller
Campus Pastor

Appendix F: Invitations and Reminders

Information Session Invitation to the Community



What: Doctoral Thesis Project Information Session: Faith Exploration Sunday

When: This Sunday Feb. 16 at 6:30 PM

Where: Community Room

Why: If you are curious about life's most difficult questions such as: What can I trust? What hope do I have? And, what happens when this life is over? Come! This is where we begin to get answers.

What else: Dessert buffet and a raffle for valuable prizes

Other: This is part of a Doctoral thesis project. Residents will be asked to sign consent and some will be invited to participate in 3 dinner teachings sessions (Free dinners)

Invitation to Phase 2 Teaching Sessions

Dear Name:

Thank you for attending the Information Session on February 16 and for completing the questionnaire. Based on your responses, I would like to invite you to attend a series of teachings titled "Food for Thought." These 3 one-hour sessions will occur over dinner in the [REDACTED] private dining room.

If you choose to participate in this phase you will be asked to attend three consecutive dinner/teaching sessions on Monday evenings and complete the same questionnaire that you took initially. Afterwards, I will personally reach out to you and talk to you about your results. While the teaching sessions will last 45 minutes to one hour, they will be over dinner and you may eat and listen to the information, ask questions, and receive clarification on one of the issues each week. The sessions will be centered on providing you with research and biblical information in a relaxed format on the certainty of God, the Bible and Heaven. You are not required to change your viewpoint on any of these issues. Your name and presence will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential as will the others in this small group.

To participate, simply return the inserted card that indicates that you will participate in phase 2.

You had previously completed a consent form that indicated that you would continue with phase 2 if selected for this part of the study.

If you choose to participate, you will receive 3 complimentary dinners with a small group in the private dining area. These dinners are at no cost to you. If you cannot attend a session, please let me know so that I might arrange to get you an outline of the information. You should attend all 3 sessions, but will not be disqualified if you miss a session.

Sincerely,

Rev. Mark Triller
Campus Pastor

Session 1 Reminder

Reminder:



3 Mondays, 3 Dinners, 3 great conversations
2/24, 3/2, 3/9

The First Dinner Conversation is on:

Monday February 24 at 4:30

In the

Assisted Dining Room

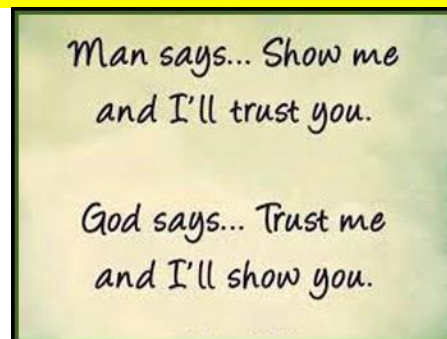
Topic: How True is the Bible?

Session 2 Reminder

Reminder:



Welcome to Session 2:
Monday March 2 at 4:30
Assisted Dining Room
“How much do I trust God?”



Session 3 Reminder

Reminder:



Welcome to Session 3:

Monday March 9 at 4:30

Assisted Dining Room

“Heaven, how can we be sure?”



Includes: Wrap-up and questionnaire

Appendix G: “Food for Thought” Session Notes

Session 1: The Bible is True
Monday February 24, 2020

Preparation done: Prior to this session, the researcher figured that sound amplification would be necessary, therefore, a portable speaker and mic would be used and the group could decide if it was needed. The twelve participants were reminded of the session on February 20 in person and many were spoken to on the morning of the 24th to ensure their attendance. Each of the twelve place settings was set with an outline of the PowerPoint slides and a pen to take any notes even though no action of notetaking was required.

Outline of the Teaching Discussion:

1. Prayer before beginning was established before the meal for any requests, for the Word being shared and its understanding and for the servers and the needs of the participants.
2. An introduction was laid and the purpose of the project was given to the participants.
3. The ground rules were set about asking questions. They could be asked at any time for clarification, however, the most important questions should be saved for the end.
4. Paul's testimony from Acts 20:26-27 was shared.
5. A lesson on 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and discussion of eyewitness testimony and its importance in establishing truth.
6. The prophecies fulfilled: the participants received an outline of 33 prophecies from the Bible in the Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus. A discussion as to the importance of this lasted fifteen minutes.
7. The Bible's own claims: 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 discussed in relation to the importance of eye witness testimony and prophecies.
8. The four Gospels: a discussion concluded with the importance of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and how different details confirm eyewitness accounts as they would in any other event.

The question session: Five men asked all of the questions related to the session. This was a surprise to the researcher and to some of the other participants. The time for questions extended beyond the expected end time for the session.

Session observations: All twelve participants were engaged and alert during the session. Not much speaking could occur when meal orders were taken, so that time will be filled with music, hymns and spiritual songs in the next sessions. Three participants offered concern that certain participants had dominated the question period and requested that the researcher speak to those people, which was agreed. The participants enjoyed the meal and they uniformly wanted to continue with amplified sound. They were reminded of the next session and the topic: Trust in God. Four of the participants were surprised that they did not need to write anything and were glad of this fact.

Session 2: Trust in God
Monday March 2, 2020

Preparation done: The sound system was put in place and the researcher had hymns that were requested by the participants playing before they arrived. The table was identical to how it was set in the first session and a notes packet was placed before each place setting. The researcher send an invitation to each participant on the Thursday before the gathering and, once again, called each as a reminder to attend.

Outline of the Teaching Discussion:

1. Once again, the gathering was begun with prayer.
2. A reminder of the past week's lesson was provided for the first five minutes of the session. It was offered to understand the number of manuscripts, archaeological findings, biblical prophecies, and changed lives to consider the truth of the Bible.
3. Using the assumption that the Bible is true as a building block, the question was posed, "Does God then have a plan and purpose that he wants to share with us?"
4. A discussion on what is meant by the "Kingdom of God" and "salvation" was introduced.
5. Contemporary literature and the "5 Most Important Areas of Trust" was offered: integrity, honesty, consistency, intent, and transparency.
6. The data that Americans believe in greater numbers that people can be trusted less today than they could twenty years ago was considered.
7. The question, "Are people basically good?" was posed. The atrocities of man over the history of mankind were discussed.
8. The Bible's refutation of man's goodness was reveled in Romans 3:23, Romans 3:12, and Isaiah 53:6.
9. The goodness of God was reveled through scriptures Exodus 34:6, Mark 10:18, and Psalm 145:9.
10. The last question was posed and began a session of questioning: "If God is good and we trust God is good, what do we trust God for?"

The question session: There was much more balance with this session. More people asked questions as they responded to this question that was offered to them. They offered the things that were expected such as "I trust God for my life," "I trust him to provide for me," and "I trust him with my prayers." It was not anticipated that someone would respond with the answer that led to the final session, but one person said, "I trust God for my salvation." The researcher added, "But do you trust God with your death."

Session observations: All of the participants were present for the session. They enjoyed the music to begin the second session. Each person sat in the same seat that they chose for the first session even though no assignments were made or expected. The session did not go over the allotted time and the familiarity that people were building with one another prompted the researcher to call them to attention to begin the session as many were talking to one another in greater measure than with the first session.

Session 3: The Assurance of Salvation Monday March 9, 2020

Preparation done: Much was carried forward from session 2 so the researcher continued with the invitation placed in the mailbox and the call to each participant. One resident was not there on time, so the researcher went to her door and saw that she was in her seat to begin the session. Packets of PowerPoint slides were once again placed on the settings of the participants. The questionnaire, “A Second Glance” was prepared for the participants to take at the end of the session. A sign-up for the follow-up session was also prepared so that arrangements could be made at the end of this session.

Outline of the Teaching Discussion:

1. The third session was begun by prayer.
2. A review of the previous week’s lesson was given to the participants. They were reminded that the questionnaire would once again be completed and their date for follow-up would be confirmed.
3. Statistics of Americans’ greatest fears were shared. It was demonstrated that “fear of death” has increased since 1991.
4. A Roper study on “Who can go to heaven?” as understood by people of various religious backgrounds was shared.
5. Revelation 20:14-15 was considered in relation to the question, “Is hell real?” This also was positioned to consider if the participants still agreed the Bible is true and that God can be trusted.
6. In consideration of the Bible, the question, “How does one get to heaven?” was placed before the scriptures Galatians 2:16, Titus 3:5, and Ephesians 2:8-9.
7. The question, “Can we be sure of this?” was answered with 1 John 5:12-13.
8. From some of the earlier questions received from the participants, an explanation of how God can be both loving and just was provided.
9. The assumption that most people are good enough and go to heaven was countered by Matthew 7:13-14.
10. Quotes by Ralph Drollinger, Stephen Cole, Jesus to the criminal on the cross illustrated the points that Jesus paid it all, no help was needed, and heaven is a present reality.
11. Romans 10:9-10 concluded the session and a salvation prayer was explained and offered to anyone that wanted to participate.

The question session: More questions were asked than at the previous two sessions. The nature of these questions were more on point with regard to the issue of salvation than in previous sessions where questions veered away from the topic. The fairness or unfairness of those that might not have heard of God or live in remote places took up more time than any other question. Jews and their eternal fate was a question of intrigue.

Session observations: Participants maintained good rapport and it was a surprise to see that all twelve attended all sessions. All completed the questionnaire more quickly than they did the first time and reservations for a follow-up were made by each. Many remarked that they wanted more and wish that the sessions could continue.

Appendix H: Follow-Up Session Materials

Follow-up Consultation with Pastor Mark

Number	Meeting Place					
48	Saturday March 21 at 12 PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
47	Saturday March 21 at 11 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
45	Saturday March 21 at 10 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
36	Thursday March 19 at 11 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
27	Thursday March 19 at 10 AM_	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
26	Monday March 16 at 4 PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
25	Monday March 16 at 3 PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
11	Monday March 16 at 10 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
7	Monday March 16 at 11 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
6	Monday March 16 at 2 PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
5	Thursday March 12 at 9 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL
3	Thursday, March 12 at 10 AM	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	PM	M	AL

Meeting Place: PM is Pastor Mark's 3rd floor office, M is your apartment, AL is this dining room

Follow-up Questions and Responses

1. What was most memorable or helpful to you with regard to the Food for Thought teaching sessions?
 - “It reminded me of how excited I was to come to Christ in the first place. I remember my husband asking me, ‘How can you be so calm?’ and I just said, ‘I have faith.’”
 - “I liked diving deeply into the issues that we don’t normally discuss in church or in this setting.”
 - “Eating with the group and sitting and listening to explanations and everyone’s questions.”
 - “The PowerPoint slides brought things home. I actually had a resident ask me if I thought the Bible was true. Well, I was ready with my answer.”
 - “Going over the 44 proven prophecies was really huge.”
 - “Enjoyed seeing you blossom and associate with Catholics, they had some training but not understanding of what they were taught. Now they were learning and it was exciting.”
 - “The continued conversations about the sessions since we were in them together.”
 - “Hearing other people’s opinions like their thoughts about Jesus. A lot of questions and answers.
 - “I liked it all. I was never into the Bible and my learning expanded. I developed total trust in God.”
 - “I felt I was getting closer to the Lord.”

2. Is there anything that you would recommend that could have been done differently?
 - “We should listen to the majority who are not interested in faith-based initiatives and find out how to get them interested. We need a ‘buzz’ session.”
 - “More teaching on the right way to look up questions in the Bible.”
 - No, we hit on a lot of points that people needed to know.”
 - “More sessions. I was dangling on the brink of getting it when we had to stop.”
 - “It worked out as good as I could have hoped.”

- Some of it was repetition for me, but the Holy Spirit information was new.”

3. What personally did you conclude from session 1: Is the Bible True?

- “The eyewitnesses and the prophecy established the truth of Jesus.”
- “At the very least it is very incredible to think about the people that gave so much to bring us the Bible.”
- “It was explained well and I still believe that it is true.”
- “There was a time that I was mad at God because of my husband’s death and I didn’t go to church. When my daughters convinced me to go back, I saw the Bible in a new way. This (teaching) made it even clearer for me.”
- “It made me start reading it more often. Now, I’m reading it every day. The Bible has become new to me. It’s interesting that it talks to me differently.”
- “What upsets me is that men sat down and decided what was going to be included. I have a book about the gospel of Judas, but that is not in the Bible.”
- “This reinforced the training that I had when I was young.”
- “Now I read it daily. Sometimes twice a day.”
- “Brought me closer and confirmed what I believed.”

4. What personally did you conclude from session 2: Trust in God?

- “I do trust God, but I don’t really always get an answer from him. Sometimes it doesn’t come. I have wondered, ‘Does he really care about me? And ‘Why should he?’ But now I wonder less.”
- “Yes to trusting God. Even when something doesn’t go well, the first place I go is to God.”
- “I always did and I would not be here today if I didn’t.”
- “It helped to lead me into the next part of the journey. If you don’t have faith you won’t have trust.”
- “Some questions that don’t have answers. Why would God let a 2-year-old die that has cancer?”
- “I always blamed God when I was an orphan but now I see he was there.”

- “Instead of dwelling on dying I am getting an inkling of going forward. It is just startling! I have a good feeling about anticipating what is next and now I feel like I have something to look forward to.”
- “I go to God 100% now. People go to God for only their reasons but I have expanded going to God on behalf of others now.”

5. What personally did you conclude from session 3: Certainty of Salvation?

- “I think I will live my life with faith. It is in my DNA. Based on how I live my life, I’m going to heaven.”
- “Yes I believe that Christ is here with me and I am going to heaven to be with him.”
- “I want to be with loved ones and the Lord and heaven is that place.”
- “Well, I have been back and forth on this. Before I said that no one can really know. Now I would say, ‘Yes, I can know it.’”
- “I used to ask, ‘Why would God want me?’ Now I am starting to believe in God’s grace and love.”
- “My brother-in-law believes that when he dies Jesus will walk right down the street and pick him up. I believe the Holy Spirit will come for me.”
- “Yes I believe it now. I struggled with not being sure. But if I confess my sins and trust in God and believe in Jesus’ sacrifice I will be in heaven.”

Appendix I: Supplemental Sermon Outlines

“Is the Bible True?” 2 Part Series

1. The Eyewitnesses
 - A. The importance of three and a half years of sharing life together
 - B. 1 Corinthians 15: the importance of an eyewitness of a risen Savior
2. Compelling testimony heard
 - A. 2 Peter 1:17
 - B. What about accepting God is compelling to know if Peter heard God’s voice?
3. The prophecies fulfilled
 - A. 2 Peter 1:19
 - B. Fulfilled prophesies: Genesis 3:8–15, Genesis 22:15–18, Isaiah 7:10–14, Isaiah 9:2–7, Micah 5:2–5.
4. History of the Bible and its authors
 - Archaeology and biblical accuracy
5. Trusting the Gospel accounts of Jesus
 - A. A comparison of the four gospels
 - B. Why do differences among them add to their believability?

Sermon Outline #2

“Can I Trust God?” 2 Part Series

1. Intelligent Creator
 - A. The alternative has been debated.
 - B. Problem people have: someone greater and smarter than you is in charge.
2. Literature Referencing God
 - A. Mortimer Adler: “The Great books of the Western World” longest essay is God
 - B. Other cultures borrow spiritual truths
 - C. Great literature and biblical citations about God
3. Reason
 - A. The ability to reason and the certainty that God exists
 - B. “Six straightforward reasons to believe God exists” from everystudent.com
4. Our Conscience and Understanding of God
 - The moral law that is written on your heart
5. What God says about Himself
 - Genesis 1:1, Exodus 34:6, Numbers 23:19, Deuteronomy 4:39, 1 Samuel 2:2, Psalm 33:4–5, Isaiah 40:28, Revelation 1:8

Sermon Outline #3

“The Certainty of Heaven and Salvation for the Believer” 2 Part Series

1. What does the Bible say about assurance?
 - A. Romans 8:14–16
 - B. Defining the term “assurance”
2. The Word of God and assurance
 - A. The question of belief and faith and how to get there
 - B. The Spirit of God directing believers to all truth
 - C. Spiritual gifts that unfold the truth of assurance
3. Adoption as God’s children
 - A. A biblical understanding of the Father
 - B. God as spiritual Father
 - C. Coming to God without fear
4. Assurance in Sanctification
 - A. What is sanctification?
 - B. 2 Corinthians 1:12
 - C. Spirit of God chastening
5. Full assurance of salvation
 - A. What is the difference?
 - B. 1 John 2:3–6
 - C. The moral test: 1 John 2:7–11
 - D. Visible path to assurance of heaven: 1 John 5:13

Appendix J: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 30, 2020

Mark V. Triller

IRB Exemption 4138.013020: Examining Biblical Certainty of Salvation among the Elderly in Interdenominational Resident Communities

Dear Mark V. Triller,

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 that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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
Research Ethics Office

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY
Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971