

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Information to Transformation: The Implementation and Effects of Sermon-Aligned Daily  
Bible Study on Spiritual Growth**

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

by  
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**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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What would occur if the biblical text that was preached in a weekend sermon was not relegated to a singular communication of information? What would change if the life of the sermon was extended through the practice of daily, scriptural study? What growth could we expect from an individual who is involved in daily Scripture that is not only integrated in the community of faith, but also aligned with the weekend sermon? It is precisely from questions such as these, that this thesis was formed.

The purpose of this project was to study the implementation and effects of Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Study on an individual's level of spiritual growth. Combining the spheres of Biblical academia and educational assessment methodologies, this research establishes the validity of utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy as a means to measure spiritual growth experienced by an individual involved in Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Study. Simply stated, if individuals engage in daily biblical studies that are aligned with the upcoming weekend's sermon, then there will be a sustained increase in spiritual growth (as it can be stratified using Bloom's Taxonomy).

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## **Abbreviations**

ESV	English Standard Version
LPC	LifePoint Church
SADBS	Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Study
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The transition from informational retention to a lifestyle of transformation can be quite challenging. Moreover, the conversion of biblical truth into consistent, daily action is crucial to growth, development, and maturity of the Christian. This fundamental conversion from information to transformation is integral, but often unexplored. Acts 2:42-46 is a powerful summary of this Christian identity in the formation of the early church.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”<sup>1</sup>

There are many nuances in this Scripture that invite careful exegesis and detailed hermeneutics, but one cannot help but notice that what concluded with the expansive, exponential growth in the early church began with a fundamental devotion to both teaching and fellowship. The Lord willingly added many to a community that was devoted to building genuine fellowship and biblical teaching. Acts 2:42-47 was profound summarizing statement for the early community of Christ followers, should it not also be true for churches today? For the church, learning in community matters. For the Christian church, which is seeking to maintain and sustain healthy growth, the act of learning Scripture in community has to matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

Empowered by Spirit through the grace of Jesus, the early church was resiliently committed to knowing, growing, and showing their faith as one community together. Learning communities that are dedicated to scriptural teaching are catalytic for the advancement of the Gospel, but the strategic development of this type of fellowship is unfortunately rare. In a cultural milieu predicated on busyness and instant gratification, the development of consistently communal scriptural learning can be problematic. When churches fail to strategically think through the effective communication of biblical information, there will be a deficiency in Christocentric transformation. If churches are to embrace the call of transformation, it must embrace an intentional attention to information.

### **Ministry Context**

Prior to the establishment and defense of a well-organized research project, it is necessary to lay the contextual framework in which this study will take place. Although there are a multitude of nuanced factors that could be discussed regarding location and identity, the aim of this contextual overview is to be pointed and purposeful. The following overview of this researcher's ministerial contextualization will cover location, meaningful contextual nuances, ministerial identity, the people of LifePoint Church League City (LPC), and the Mission of LPC. In the subsequent sections, it is important to see how the ministry context connected to the church's identity and furthermore the establishment of this action research project. The first contextual element for this action research is the ministerial location.

## The Ministerial Location

For the purpose of this thesis, the community of LPC will be taken into consideration and utilized as the primary population for assessment. LPC was founded in 2008 by a small group of men and women in League City. LPC is a community of Christ followers located in League City, Texas. League City is a suburb of the ever-expanding metropolis of Houston. Mirroring the rapid expansion being experienced in the booming metropolis of Houston, League City has also experienced an exponential population increase throughout the last decade. In the last ten years, League City has more than tripled in size, making it one of the fastest growing suburbs in the greater Houston area. With new housing developments being erected consistently, a previously quaint small town now offers major amenities typically found in large suburban areas. With the rapid population increase, it is necessary to further articulate LPC's position within this expanding suburb.

LPC is located in the Eastern portion of the League City suburb. Specifically, LPC has one building which can be found in a shopping plaza directly adjacent to one of the main streets in the area. Even though the shopping plaza sees consistent traffic throughout the week, LPC's building is obscured in a back corner with a nonideal location. The neighborhoods and smaller communities surrounding the church supply the majority of weekly attendees at LPC, while a smaller portion of congregants do travel from neighboring areas to participate in the weekly gatherings. LifePoint Church averaged between 280 and 330 individual attendees at the time of this thesis. In addition to a broad overview of the ministerial location, there are a few valuable nuances that are worth discussion.

LPC is located in close proximity to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and has many individuals in the congregation who are closely associated with that line

of work. Whether they are functioning in positions of leadership, participating in service, or passive attendees, LPC has several individuals who either are working or have worked for NASA during their professional career. Statistically, League City is above the national average in regard to median household income, safety, public education, and employment. These desirable attributes coupled with the close proximity of NASA and the oil industry's prevalence in the greater Houston area make League City a desirable location for working professionals and young families alike. Unlike Houston, League City does not possess a high percentage of ethnic diversity. League City remains a predominately Caucasian suburb of Houston.

### *Communal Demographics*

In many ways, LPC reflects the demographics which are made visible in the surrounding communities. First, LPC is a largely Caucasian congregation with movement and aspirations toward an increased ethnic diversity. Second, the above average public education and affluence in League City are also visible in the Church's identity. Finally, LPC mirrors the surrounding community in its possession of young families and working professionals. Where LPC is deficient in ethnic diversity, it displays a range of ages from newborns to senior citizens. While it is important to note the significance that communal demographics have upon LPC, it would be an oversight to describe the ministerial context without discussing the impact of Hurricane Harvey on Houston.

### *The Significance of Hurricane Harvey*

In August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey unleashed unrivaled amounts of rain on Houston and its surrounding communities. The communities surrounding LPC and areas south of Houston

experienced terrible and historic flooding which displaced tens of thousands. Although Hurricane Harvey slipped from the focus of mainstream media in a matter of weeks, the difficulty arising from that catastrophic storm would not so easily pass from the hearts and minds of many in League City and the surrounding communities. More than two years removed from the flooding associated with Hurricane Harvey, some congregants at LPC have only recently returned to their homes. For those who lived in Houston during Hurricane Harvey, it is a catastrophic moment which serves as a historical marker in the hearts and minds of many. Hurricane Harvey undoubtedly produced heartache, but it also grew a remarkable sense of resiliency and comradery in LPC, League City, and the surrounding communities. This resiliency and comradery are integral as the further ministerial identity of LPC is developed.

### The Ministerial Identity

Upon its conception in 2008, LPC was associated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Although LPC continues to associate with and contribute to the SBC, its practical independence and theological autonomy have resulted in a non-denominational associative identity. LPC celebrated ten years of ministry in League City in 2018, but its decade of Gospel ministry has not been without difficulty. For a fifteen-month period, from late May of 2017 to August of 2018, LPC was without a lead pastor. At the outset of this thesis project, LPC was eighteen months into a church revitalization project which was preceded by the fifteen-month period without a lead pastor.

In the wake of leadership turnover and a void of pastoral leadership, select elders and their wives worked to oversee the church logistics, sustain the preaching, lead the community, and eventually search for a lead Pastor for their community. In that time period, the toughness

evidenced in the wake of Hurricane Harvey was present once again in the leadership of the church. By God's grace, a resilient few maintained the church despite the pastoral vacancy. In August of 2018, a pastor was selected to lead the church. From the selection of the lead pastor in August of 2018, LPC experienced consistent numerical growth in a year over year analysis. The weekly attendance has increased by 76% according to an analysis provided in the fall of 2019.

The numerical growth has not been without loss, however. Many who were in the church prior to the void of pastoral leadership in May of 2017 left the LPC Community. Although there has been a large amount of turnover in leadership and attendance, several core families in the congregation have maintained consistent resiliency throughout the many seasons of LPC. This subsection of resilient families remained committed not to any one person or pastor, but rather to a community and vision which is embodied in the mission of LPC. It was precisely within this mission and vision that this project was formed.

### *The Mission of LPC*

LifePoint Church has a consistent and often communicated Mission Statement. The LifePoint community is committed to pointing others to life in Christ as they seek to know, grow and show the love of Jesus. The aforementioned values of knowing, growing, and showing faith are manifested in different ways throughout the LPC community. First, LPC values knowing the biblical text. LifePoint Church's weekly gatherings are casual and contemporary with a verse-by-verse expository teaching through Scripture. Specifically, LPC preached through the Gospel of John, sections of the Psalter, Hebrews 11, and Philippians. The aim of expository preaching through the Gospel of John is to foster a biblically-literate, theologically informed community



that not only knows their faith, but seeks to embody it in everyday life. For this reason, knowing the love of Jesus was the first dimension of the LPC mission.

Second, LPC values growing in the faith. In particular, LPC has smaller community groups which meet in homes across the community, throughout the week called Life Groups. In October of 2019 40% of the church body was actively involved in LifeGroup communities. Although these groups consisted of LPC attendees, there is not a cohesiveness or alignment of subject matter across the groups. While the majority of yearly preaching moves through a set biblical text, each group studies a unique subject matter throughout the week. Third and finally, LPC values showing the faith. Showing faith is evidenced in service to the community through one's words, works, and wealth. LifePoint Church aims to both involve its congregation in the weekly worship and Life Group community and demonstrate lifestyle of active service.

The mission of pointing others to life in Christ by knowing, growing, and showing faith is being manifested in the rapid growth church revitalization community. The rapid expansion and growth of the greater Houston area has brought an increasing number of young families and working professionals into the ever-expanding suburb of League City. With that growth, LPC continues to expand. Additionally, the desirable living conditions of League City coupled with the influence of both NASA and the Oil Industry have resulted a community replete with opportunity and advancement. Based upon unsolicited feedback, the mission of LPC and its specific bent toward expository preaching and small group community have blossomed and resonated with the church body. Systematic, expository preaching through the Bible on a weekly basis presents the church with an opportunity to maintain unity and shared vision in the backdrop of rapid growth. Despite the focus on expository preaching the weekly gathering, there is an

untapped potential for communal alignment and increased sermon retention within the current ministerial methodology of LPC.

Within this void, daily Biblical studies which are aligned with the biblical text that is preached will not only resonated with the intellectual milieu of the LPC community, but it also presented an opportunity for further church unification. Moving individuals from purely retaining information to the development of further connections fit the identity of LPC and the mission which existed prior to the development of this action research project. It is precisely into this context, that the problem must be presented. It is within this communal climate and discipleship structure, that this applied research project will take its shape.

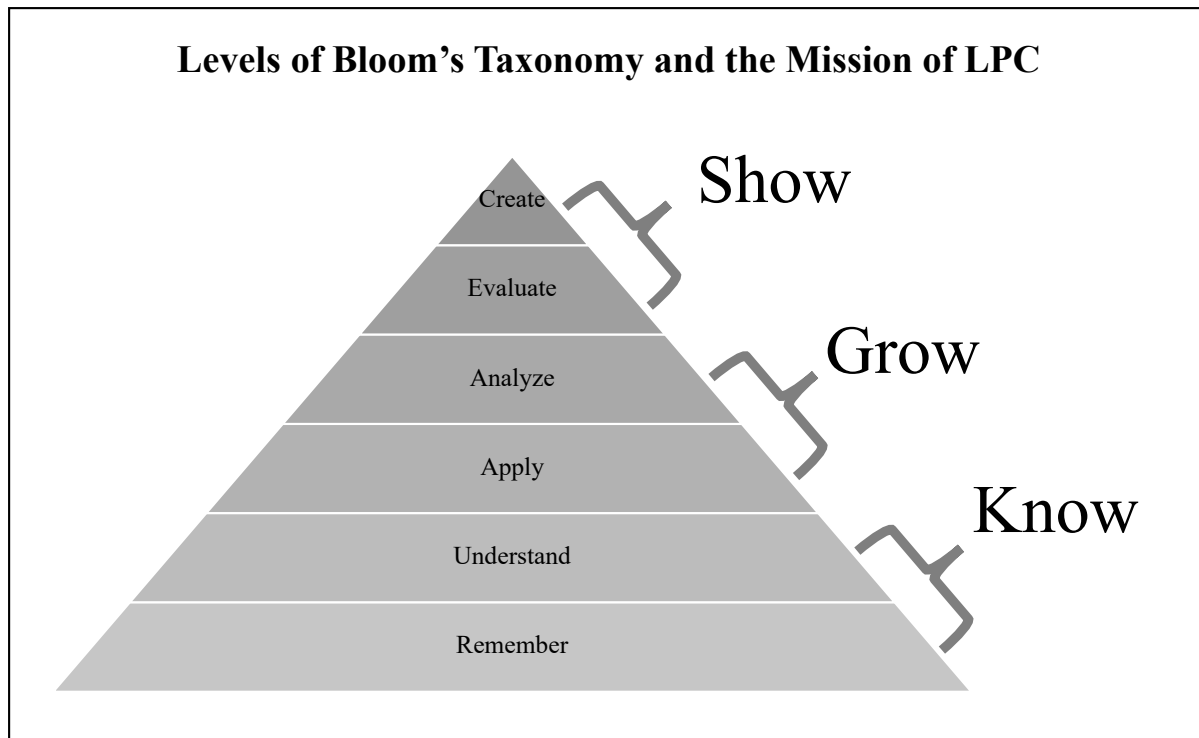
### *The Integration of Bloom's Taxonomy at LPC*

As stated previously, the mission of LPC is to point others to life in Christ through knowing, growing, and showing the Christian faith. This ministerial identity has a transferrable connectivity with the various levels of cognition detailed in Bloom's taxonomy.<sup>2</sup> LPC's mission statement and the layers of Bloom's Taxonomy can be succinctly interconnected (see figure 1 on the next page).

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<sup>2</sup> Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001).

**Figure 1.** The Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy as allocated in the mission statement of LPC.



The first communal value identified is knowing the faith. The first two levels of cognition in Bloom's Taxonomy are remembering and understanding. Remembering is identified by an individual's ability to remember or recognize terminology, ideas, patterns, or principles.<sup>3</sup> The second level entitled understanding is characterized by an individual's ability to read and understand descriptions, communications, reports or regulations.<sup>4</sup> In this way, both remembering and understanding fit within the overall framework of knowing the faith.

The second component of the LPC mission is growing in the faith. The value of growing in the faith could be subcategories within the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy entitled applied and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>4</sup> Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), 31.

analyzed learning. The Application level of Bloom's taxonomy is characterized by a learner's ability to apply ideas, procedures, methods, formulas, and in-job situations.<sup>5</sup> The analysis level of Bloom's taxonomy is characterized by a participant's ability to recognize and break down information into constituent parts and recognize relationships.<sup>6</sup> Within the discipleship methodology of LifeGroups, the third and fourth levels of cognition epitomize the movement to growing in the faith.

The final communal value of LPC is showing the faith. Showing the faith could be allocated into levels five and six of Bloom's Taxonomy. These levels are a useful tool for gauging an individual's increased levels of understanding and application. Level five of Bloom's taxonomy is entitled Evaluate.<sup>7</sup> The evaluation tier of learning is characterized by an individual's ability to make judgments about proposed ideas, estimate accuracy, and identify effectiveness. Finally, the creation tier of learning is characterized by an individual's ability to show a pattern or structure, identify data, and produce a further form from which a conclusion can be drawn.<sup>8</sup> From remembrance, or rote memory, to creation and the establishment of renewed conclusions, Bloom's taxonomy matches the missional overview of LPC and evaluates an individual's level of growth through the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies (SADBS).

### **Problem Presented**

The problem is that individuals who regularly attend a weekend church service may not mature in their faith due to a lack of consistent Bible study aligned with the sermon. Acts 2:42-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

46 presents a compelling vision for Christian community that is consistently devoted to the study of Scripture, maturing in the faith, and living in community. In a sense, the early church is knowing, growing, and showing their faith. As a result, God added to their number with consistency. Individuals who are heavily involved in the church may fail to grow into maturity and progress from information to transformation, because of a deficiency of consistently aligned daily Bible reading. A movement from the basic retention of sermon information to life-changing biblical transformation is less likely to occur without consistent communal study.

For individuals who do practice daily Bible reading, there is seldom an alignment of that discipline within the communal study of the church. As a result, a regular attendee at LPC will often experience their first encounter with a given biblical text as it is introduced from the pulpit. An individual who does not practice daily study of the biblical text is more likely to limit his or her level of spiritual growth (as it can be observed in Bloom's Taxonomy). The lack of personal consistency and congregational alignment regarding daily Bible study has decelerated the church's ability to transfer biblical information with spiritual transformation.

A challenging disconnect can arise when the busyness of everyday life collides with the need for consistent time with God. Whether it is the hectic nature of one's schedule or a general tide of complacency, a trend of devotional apathy can often take root in both individuals and communities without detection. The church, dedicated to the faithfully building the community of faith, is in desperate need of a strategy to address this problem. LPC is a community which is comprised of an intellectual hunger which would do well to be paired with SADBS. LPC's growth, if it is to maintain spiritual health and vitality, must maintain a constancy of focus and effort. Sermon-aligned, community-based daily Bible studies present a workable resolution.

These studies could provide supplemental depth for some and a valuable first step toward biblical literacy for others. It is precisely toward these needs that this research is aimed.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry research project was to study the effect that daily biblical study, which is aligned with the preached text, had on a participant's level of spiritual growth. This project is designed to address the apparent deficiency of alignment between the process of an individual's daily biblical study and the retention of sermonic content. This research is designed to explore if daily scriptural reading aligned with the upcoming weekend sermon will raise the level of spiritual growth. This project will seek to answer the research question, "Does daily biblical study which is linked to weekend preaching cause an individual to increase in levels of cognition as defined in Bloom's Taxonomy?" In short, Bloom's taxonomy functions as an assessment tool in order to gauge an individual's level of cognitive growth. Surveys were issued before, during, and after this action research project in order to gauge an increase of cognition which moves a participant from rote memory to the creation of new connections. Bloom's Taxonomy is an assessment tool that highlight participants' increasing level of not only memory, but also analysis and application. For the purpose of this project, Bloom's taxonomy will be utilized as a primary assessment tool to study the influence that daily biblical study has on increased levels of cognition. The aim, however, is not merely to increase the retention of information through daily studies, but to catalyze biblically based transformation.

This project will study and analyze the impact of SADBS on the individual's ability to remember, understand, and apply scriptural truth. The data will come from a church revitalization experiencing rapid growth with a consistent paradigm of expositional preaching.

Within this context, this study aims to gauge the effectiveness of daily Scripture reading in sustaining healthy, biblically literate growth (as measured by increasing levels of cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy).

### **Basic Assumptions**

In any action research project, it is necessary to highlight basic assumptions that are supposed to be plausible by this researcher. These assumptions are practical and theoretical presuppositions that are necessary semantics that need to be disclosed in order to craft a workable foundation for applied research. There are six assumptions which are detailed with lucid brevity below.

First, this researcher must assume that the number of individuals that will be involved in the project and participating in the daily Bible Studies is a valid sample. Sample size can be a problematic aspect of a project if a researcher is attempting to establish causation. The projected thesis of this applied research project is not geared primarily toward establishing causation, but a correlation between an individual's level of participation in daily Bible study and his or her ability to advance in spiritual growth from information to transformation. This researcher must assume the sample size for research is valid.

Second, this researcher must assume that the answers given by participants who will be given anonymity will be honest answers. There is no guarantee of transparency or truthfulness when issuing surveys to a collection of individuals, but this research project must assume those surveyed to be honest in their disclosure of participation with and integration of the information provided through daily Bible studies. Survey information was designed and implemented to increase a sense of anonymity and proposed transparency.

Third, this research project assumes that the biblical text of The Acts of the Apostles is a usable portion of the cannon to be preached through and collectively studied. This reasoning behind this selection will be further detailed in a methodology portion of this project. This researcher assumes that the description of the early church given by Luke in the book of Acts is a profitable text for the first integration of SADBS in LPC.

Fourth, this researcher assumes the five studies each week is an adequate number of studies in order to acclimate a participant to the text that will be preached in the upcoming week's sermon. The intention of five studies is to engage the preached text within the minds of participants in the week prior to that text's exposition. Five daily studies are aimed toward mirroring the weekday habits of the average participant. This researcher assumes the five-day study model as an appropriate balance between consistency and an overbearing task.

Additionally, this research will be implemented over a seventeen-week period from April to August of 2020. This researcher assumes that time frame to be a sustainable and usable section for assessment.

Fifth, this researcher acknowledges the legitimacy of the influence that the power of observation can have upon the one who is observed. The Hawthorne Effect which has also been entitled the observer effect describes the manner in which an individual who is aware that he or she is being observed will modify their behavior.<sup>9</sup> This propensity of behavior modification is anticipated and assumed by this researcher. This researcher is aware that the pastoral influence may cause a change, whether conscious or subconscious, on those who participated in the study.

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<sup>9</sup> Sedgwick, Philip and Nan Greenwood. "Understanding the Hawthorne Effect." BMJ British Medical Journal (Online) 351 (Sep 04, 2015), <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1777805262?accountid=12085>.



Sixth and finally, this researcher assumes Bloom's Taxonomy to be a workable hierarchy of understanding. Furthermore, this project assumes the layers of cognition detailed in Bloom's Taxonomy are helpful for gauging the growth or stagnation of an individual participating in the study. Survey questions to be included throughout the process and focus groups in the conclusion of the study will be orchestrated and stratified according to the taxonomy's levels of cognition.

### **Definitions**

When establishing a defensible argument, definitional clarity is of the utmost importance. For that reason, this researcher has selected terminology to be given special clarification. This research inquiry will implement daily Bible studies which are aligned with the upcoming Biblical text to be expounded in the weekly sermon. It is posited by this researcher that the implementation of SADBS in community will yield growth in spiritual growth as it is identifiable utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy. Within this overview of problem and procedure, there are several definitions in need of further clarity.

1. Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies-This researcher defined sermon-aligned daily studies as five weekday studies which focus on the Biblical Text which is the basis for the upcoming weekend sermon. Sermonic alignment was the intentional terminology chosen to articulate the manner in which each of the five studies will expand on the text that will be preached in the following weekend.

2. Spiritual Growth- Spiritual growth is Christ-like change resulting in action and virtue.<sup>10</sup> Spiritual growth involves the careful reflection on Scripture and is best done within the Christian community.<sup>11</sup>

### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to certain controls which are placed upon this applied research project which are external constraints that are beyond the control of this researcher. For the purpose of this research project, the sample to be used will necessarily be a convenient sample. Simply put, the data collected throughout the project is to be gathered from attendees of LPC, upon their accessibility and convenience. Although this project will consider the level of a participant's commitment to participating in five daily studies over a period of seventeen weeks, the study will also attempt evaluate those who did not utilize the SADBS with regularity.

The convenience and accessibility of the sample size is not the only limitation of this project, however. The method for collecting data will be largely analyzed through survey material and focus groups. A random sample of individuals assessed through differing methodologies rather than self-reporting and survey material would admittedly provide more convincing argumentation. Nonetheless, the accessibility, willingness, communal proximity, missional identity, and intellectual climate of the LPC community make this subsection the correct direction for effective research.

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<sup>10</sup> Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Revised and Updated. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Copan, Victor A. *Changing Your Mind: The Bible, the Brain, and Spiritual Growth*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016, 75.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to any self-imposed constraints or controls placed upon a project. Through the very process of selecting SADBS as a proposed way to address the lack of consistent Bible study and communal alignment in subject matters to be studied, several delimitations have been established necessarily within this action research project. For example, even though these daily studies will be made available to everyone at LPC, they are not unequivocally accessible. First, the studies are useful insofar as a participant is able to learn and grow utilizing the process of reading. This researcher is aware that spiritual growth could be analyzed using multiple strategies. The observation of a participant's growth will be assessed from one particular angle in this action research project. Second, the studies are useful insofar as an individual is able to read. Third and finally, the studies are useful insofar as an individual can read English. Not only are there self-imposed constraints placed upon the nature of learning through reading daily studies, but there are also controls regarding time frame and projected implementation.

As mentioned in the assumptions portion of this overview, the daily studies will be implemented five days a week rather than three or seven days a week. Additionally, the duration of assessment for this research project is a seventeen-week period through the first seven chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The implementation of five daily studies was purposefully chosen to mirror the average workweek for the LPC congregant. Acts 1-7 is selected as the textual to be studied because of its development of the early church, coverage of ecclesiological themes, and its ability to be utilized in the promotion of a deeply devoted life of consistent biblical study. The effects of daily, sermon-aligned Bible studies will be concluded at Acts 7 because it is a transitional point in the early church narrative into the life and ministry of Paul.

The canonical limitations, time frame restrictions, and written methodology for teaching are all self-imposed constraints on this action research project. They are purposeful nonetheless!

### **Thesis Statement**

If individuals engage in daily biblical studies that are aligned with the upcoming weekend's sermon, then there will be a sustained increase in spiritual growth (as it can be stratified using Bloom's Taxonomy). This researcher anticipates an observable increase in levels of cognition for individuals who participate in daily biblical studies which are anchored in the text to be preached in the upcoming week's sermon. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a workable framework for measuring an individual's level of cognition pertaining to a given area of focus or given subject matter. The communal mission of LPC to know, grow, and show the faith synchronize effectively with the observation of spiritual growth. An argument for the superiority of Bloom's Taxonomy over other assessment tools will not be brought into academic discussion throughout this applied research project. Rather, Bloom's Taxonomy will be posited as one of many helpful tools for critically gauging an individual's level of comprehension and ultimately cognition. The questions ascribed to various levels of cognition in Bloom's Taxonomy will be used to critically monitor and assess a movement in a participant's level of biblical understanding in connection to their level of interaction with the sermonically aligned daily Bible studies. This study will address the lack of spiritual growth under the overarching move from information to transformation.

The integration of homiletical focus and personal spiritual practice is expected to yield a consistent progression in a participant's propensity for daily devotional reading and a coordinating ownership over his or her own personal spiritual growth. Utilizing the full range of

questions asked within the varying levels of Bloom's taxonomy, this researcher will issue surveys to gauge a participant's ability to progress through the hierarchy of spiritual growth. In addition to increased levels of spiritual growth and biblically literate community, this researcher also anticipates an ancillary increase in a participant's sermonic retention. The thesis of this project is anchored in a desire to observe and analyze the influence that consistent biblical information has on spiritual transformation. This project is designed to address the apparent deficiency of alignment between the process of an individual's daily biblical study and the retention of sermonic content. An increase in one's spiritual growth and ability to move through varying levels from information to transformation was the overarching aim and intended result of this project's observation and analysis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Conceptual Framework**

In an attempt to produce a Doctor of Ministry project which contributed to the body of knowledge in a unique and relevant manner, it was necessary to observe that which has already been studied and assessed in the collection of academic discussion. This process of literature review was designed to both study relevant themes that appeared and to determine gaps which existed in the contemporary collection of biblical or ministerial study. When studying the relevant, scholarly works associated with the practice of daily biblical study and increasing levels of spiritual growth, a few different themes appeared across the literature.

### **Literature Review**

The themes, and subsequent gaps, which will be discussed with lucid brevity in this literature review are the ideas of the church as a learning community, the distinction between personalized and privatized faith, bloom's taxonomy and increased cognition, and finally biblical study which leads to transformation. It was, therefore, the aim of this literature review to identify some fundamental elements within the precedent literature that needed to be incorporated into the conceptual framework for this project.

#### **The Church as a Learning Community**

The pursuit of biblical study which is anchored in and aligned with the preached text is a movement against the tide of the transactional church model which is predicated on convenience and comfort in one's contribution to his or her spiritual development.<sup>12</sup> The notion of the church

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<sup>12</sup> Gary A. Parrett, and Steve Kang. *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 242.

as a community of people who are fiercely dedicated to growth through the process of learning was perhaps the most pronounced theme visible throughout the myriad of differing sources.<sup>13</sup> The church's identity and history are predicated on a deep desire to glorify God through the process of learning. Evan B. Howard writes, "An intellect formed in the gospel—through sincere, communal, prayerful study accompanied by a commitment to live the truth—meets the postmodern world with a framework for spirit-led dialogue."<sup>14</sup> The biblical text is directed toward community and furthermore, ought to be read and applied within the community of faith. The church's ability to learn and grow communally (Know, Grow, and Show) is integral to the church's missiological call in the world.<sup>15</sup> Robert A Traina serves as an example of a theme that was prevalent across the literature studied, when writing, "The church should be a community of biblical, theological, and moral discourse."<sup>16</sup> The integration of daily biblical study within the community matches the message of the Scriptures with the method for study. The communal study of Scripture from a deep place of personal commitment opens the biblical text to the dimensions of human relating, interpersonal communication, storytelling, and existential remembering.<sup>17</sup> Paramount to this Doctor of Ministry project and the relevant literature was a

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education*. second ed. Minneapolis: (Fortress Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape our Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: (Baker Academic, 2017), 151.

<sup>15</sup> D. Albrecht Schönherr, "The Evangelical Church as a Learning Community in a Changing World." *Religious Education* 78, no. 3 (Summer, 1983), 401.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Traina, and David R. Bauer, "Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics." (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Overend, "Education Or Formation? the Issue of Personhood in Learning for Ministry." *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4, no. 2 (2007), 144.

foundational understanding of the church as a community of learners, dedicated to growing in community.

A great deal of literature has been concerned with the discussion of communal learning, but perhaps the church is lacking in a comprehensive understanding of this facet of sanctification as it applies to the Christian community. Within the environment of academia, studies of lifelong, communal learning have blossomed but have not been applied to the specific context of church culture.<sup>18</sup> The most recent emergence regarding the study of communal church learning have been based on a long held biblical tradition of church in the home.<sup>19</sup> This conceptual development of the church as a learning community identifies the research methodology of SADBBS in the home with the ability to produce long-lasting, communal learning. This nuanced dimension of group learning leads directly into the second prevalent theme of the literature, which is a personal, and not privatized faith.

### The Distinction Between Personalized and Privatized Faith

A relevant theme that was consistently developed in the literature was centered upon the difference between having healthy, personalized faith and having an inappropriately privatized faith. Author and theologian Robert Perkins placed an emphasis on personal spiritual discipline within the evangelical church has resulted in disconnected and individualized conception of sanctification.<sup>20</sup> The aim of this project and the themes of relevant literature intersected in their

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<sup>18</sup> Steve White, "Content and Community: Lifelong Learners in the Context of Small Group Bible Studies." *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2002), 61.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Robert K. Perkins, *Bringing Home the Message: How Community can Multiply the Power of the Preached Word*. Vol. 068-0771. (2010), 83.



desire to restore a proper rejection of privatized faith which seeks to remain disassociated from the community of faith and learning.<sup>21</sup> Several scholars highlighted the negative consequences that are innately connected to privatizing a communal pursuit of spiritual development. Two examples of this trend ought to suffice. First, the prevalence of privatized faith has made it difficult for churches to practice corrective and protective accountability for one another.<sup>22</sup> Second, learning communities which reject the individualization of faith foster a sense of belonging which is profitable for increased understanding and transformation.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the literature studied for this project, there was a consistent emphasis on making personally practiced spiritual disciplines an integrated component of the community of faith. This integration is not only a more scriptural approach to daily Bible reading<sup>24</sup>, but was also identified in the relevant literature as a catalyst for effective homiletical practice.<sup>25</sup> Individual learning that is paired with communal integration is integral for transformative preaching. In the study of transformation and increased levels of cognition, this researcher's assessment centers upon a usage of Bloom's taxonomy, an understanding of cognition, and a knowledge of how people change.

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Acts 2:42-46 (ESV) reflects the notion of personalized face which refuses to be privatized as it is manifested in the community of faith.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Dean Finch, "Raising the Level of Sermon Understanding, Retention, Application, and Accountability through the Integration of Sermons and Sermon-Based Small Groups in First Baptist Church of Blanchard, OK." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, (2014), 52.

<sup>23</sup> Lyndelle Gunton, "Religious Information Literacy: Using Information to Learn in Church Community." Australian Library Journal 60, no. 2 (05, 2011), 158.

<sup>24</sup> Brian J. Wright, Communal Reading in the Time of Jesus: A Window into Early Christian Reading Practices. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Jon Harless, "Transformational Discipleship: A Model for Sermon-Based Small Groups for Life Transformation." (Liberty University, 2012), 109.

## Bloom's Taxonomy and Increased Cognition

The implementation of Bloom's taxonomy in contemporary fields of education has proved to be a powerful tool in the assessment and analysis of one's learning and conceptual growth. The hierarchy or levels of understanding present within Bloom's taxonomy make it feasible to gauge the manner in which information has been integrated into transformation. Bloom's Taxonomy is a multi-tiered model of classifying thinking into six varying levels of cognitive complexity.<sup>26</sup> Although the history of science and faith have had a historic and often inappropriately contentious relationship, many theologians and scientists are engaging in helpful dialogue concerning the overlap in biblical study, communal learning, communication theory, and the tangible significance of human relating and cognitive retention.<sup>27</sup> Bloom's taxonomy and its impact upon hermeneutical understanding is an underdeveloped aspect in relevant, contemporary academia which is concerned with how individuals think and ultimately change. The daily study of Scripture which is anchored in a learning community and aligned with the weekly sermon ought to increase one's ability to cognitively understand the text and ultimately apply it to his or her life.<sup>28</sup>

Several scholars pointed to the potential significance that Bloom's Taxonomy could have on the church. Vivian Ligo writes, "A Scriptural text, for instance, cannot be treated like objectified data from a cold and distant perspective, even if exegetes may claim they can do

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<sup>26</sup> Maureen Hemmings, "Using Bloom's Taxonomy in Primary Religious Education." *Religious Education Journal of Australia* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2011), 42.

<sup>27</sup> David A. Hogue, "Brain Matters: Practicing Religion, Forming the Faithful." *Religious Education* 107, no. 4 (2012), 340.

<sup>28</sup> Bart B. Bruehler, "Traversing Bloom's Taxonomy in an Introductory Scripture Course." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 21 (2): 92–109. doi:10.1111/teth.12428 (2018), 103.

so.”<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, this style of learning and practiced cognitive advancement is aimed toward creating a situation in which the student is challenged to integrate knowledge into application (Know, Grow, and Show).<sup>30</sup> Through the process of daily scriptural study which is assessed by a learning tool such as Bloom’s Taxonomy, a participant is able to enhance his or her propensity toward being and becoming a more active follower of Christ and contemplative interpreter of His Scripture.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the final theme of focus, found within the literature, is the idea of Biblical Study and Transformation.

### Biblical Study and Transformation

Although the literature review commenced with an emphasis on the impact of daily Bible study on the increased cognitive understanding, this study of transformational learning was consistently anchored in loving relationship and community. Biblical transformation, even when seemingly academic, is often a direct extension of loving relationship.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that changed lives can stem from an increase in cognitive understanding, but the relevant literature consistently emphasized relational connecting as the conduit through which lives are most often sanctified.<sup>33</sup> In the design, implementation, and application of this action research project, the

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<sup>29</sup> Vivian Ligo, "Evaluation as pedagogy: models of theological and pastoral formation." *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 11, no. 1 (2007): 52+. Gale Academic Onefile, 55.

<sup>30</sup> William D. Buhrman, "Globalization, Learning Outcomes, and Possibilities for Theological Education." *Religious Education* 106, no. 1 (2011), 46.

<sup>31</sup> E. J. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 20.

<sup>32</sup> McEwen, Rhonda M. "Learning that transforms: for the sake of his kingdom." *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (2012), 345.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Wayne LaDuke, "Church Revitalization: A Model for Discovering Ministry through Small Bible Study Groups." Order No. 9906980, (Drew University, 1998), 7.

integrating of community in biblical study which leads to transformation cannot be overemphasized. It is not in a lab experiment, but in the context of communal sharing that the effectual power of daily Bible Study on increased spiritual growth and biblical transformation can be completely understood.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the study of how people change is nothing new in the contemporary scholarship or even theological inquiry. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap in the literature when studying how people change through community-based, sermon-aligned daily biblical study. In the overlap of Christian community and hermeneutical consistency this project will work to address the rampant problems of undeveloped devotional lives and disjointed Scripture which lacks alignment with the text as it is preached within church.

### **Theological Foundations**

The aim of this section is to uncover and establish a precedent for the importance of biblical study within the community. In order to effectively unpack the biblical pattern for contemplative biblical reading within community, it is first necessary to unpack several examples of the importance of Bible reading separately before discussing the role of community in scriptural study. This development of theological foundations will include a discussion of the Christocentric paradigm for scriptural study, depth of study in the biblical metanarrative, the various models of communal reading which are evidenced in the Bible, and the manner in which communal reading moves individuals from information to transformation.

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<sup>34</sup> Aaron Milavec, "HOW ACTS OF DISCOVERY TRANSFORM OUR TACIT KNOWING POWERS IN BOTH SCIENTIFIC AND RELIGIOUS INQUIRY." *Zygon*. 41, no. 2, 470.

## The Christocentric Paradigm for Scriptural Study

In the establishment of a case for thoughtful biblical study within community, it is necessary to define what is meant by biblical study. Additionally, it is necessary to observe and assess the paradigm for scriptural study that is visible in Christ. While there are many examples that could be used to defend the Christocentric paradigm for biblical study, the example of Jesus and his learning narrative at the temple in Luke 2:40-52 will be assessed first.

Luke 2:40-52 is a primary and foundational paradigm for a lifestyle of consistently deep scriptural study which is coupled with spiritual growth. This narrative, familiar to many, is the story of Jesus who is accidentally left in the temple as his family travels on the road. This narrative is bookended by summarizing statements of growth. Luke 2:40 reads, “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that a passage in which Jesus is learning and growing in the community of faith is and followed by summarizing statements of growth. Luke 2:52 reads, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”<sup>36</sup> Luke, in his gospel is intentionally framing the growth of Jesus within the framework of communal study of Scripture.<sup>37</sup> In one powerful narrative Luke couples the purity and wisdom of Jesus with the process of growing through the communal study of the biblical text. It is important to note that the sufficiency and purity of Christ does not negate his propensity for growth. Simply stated, spiritual growth is not necessarily indicative of a deficiency or sinfulness. In this way, the brief and yet lucid

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<sup>35</sup> Luke 2:40 (ESV)

<sup>36</sup> Luke 2:52 (ESV)

<sup>37</sup> Milavec, 140.

presentation of Jesus as a young learner in community sets a paradigm for the communal learning and spiritual growth in the biblical text.

### *Depth of Study: The Biblical Metanarrative*

From the opening pages of Genesis to the concluding portions of Revelation, a consistent emphasis is placed upon handling Scripture well. The opening of the biblical canon and its conclusion are framed by the importance of handling the word of God well.<sup>38</sup> Genesis 3 is the infamous passage which details the sin of Adam and Eve and their separation from God in the Garden of Eden. Tempted by the words of the serpent, Adam and Eve were first challenged not only to act inappropriately, but at a more foundational level, to challenge the word that God had spoken to them. Upon further investigation of the text, the serpent attempts to undermine the authority of God's word by asking, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"<sup>39</sup> In this subtle question, the serpent successfully attempts to challenge the authority, precision, and clarity with which God had previously spoken to Adam and Eve.

In response to this question, Eve responds by adding to the words that God had previously spoken to her and Adam. Even though God had given a previous command to not eat the fruit, Eve inappropriately added to the command of God by asserting that they were commanded not to even touch the fruit. Although this edition may seem innocuous, a poor handling of God's word can still be dangerous. Manipulating these areas of doubt and confusion, the serpent successfully tempted Adam and Eve to sin, which resulted in their removal from the

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Covenant Commentary Series*, vol. 18, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2011), 314.

<sup>39</sup> Genesis 3:1 (ESV)

garden and ultimately their separation from God. It is not only in the Genesis creation narrative that we can see the significance of handling God's word well. Interestingly, in the construction of the biblical canon, the final chapter of Scripture emphasizes a careful handling of God's word.

Revelation 22 exemplifies a proper handling of Scripture insofar as it brings the biblical metanarrative to a conclusion. Revelation 22:18-19 reads,

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of this book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city, which are described in this book."<sup>40</sup>

The serpent in the garden of Eden seized the opportunity which was created through a poor handling of a word spoken by God. It is fitting then that the biblical canon concludes with Revelation 22 and the focus upon maintaining the biblical integrity. Handling the biblical texts and its implementation with Full integrity and communal focus is not only at the heartbeat of the Christocentric paradigm but is also a central focus of the entire biblical metanarrative. For this reason, Genesis and revelation both emphasize this fundamental idea. There is a Christ-centered and canonical precedent for handling Scripture with care and intensity of study. In addition, as it will be evidenced in the following section, there are ample examples of communal learning and scriptural study within individual biblical texts.

### *Depth of Study: Specific Examples*

Evidence for communal reading in Scripture is interwoven not only into the words that are included, but within the genres in which they were written. Simply stated, the biblical texts

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<sup>40</sup> Revelation 22:18-19 (ESV)

were intended to be read, study, and implemented within the confines of Christian community. In order to illustrate this dynamic, a few examples from specific vocal passages will be provided. There are three.

First, Nehemiah 8:5-8<sup>41</sup> details the powerful reading of the law by Ezra to the Israelite people. It is important to note that it is not only the reading of Scripture, but also the manner in which it is implemented within the context of community that drives this portion of the narrative in Nehemiah.<sup>42</sup> The communal reading of Scripture is intended to be fundamentally unifying in practice. In a very complicated and problematic portion of Israelite history, the communal reading of Scripture brought together many tribes and the people of Israel who were unified because of Ezra's reading. His effort toward healing, rebuilding, and revitalization were anchored in the communal reading of Scripture as it would lead to spiritual growth.

Second, Deuteronomy 31:11-12<sup>43</sup> the observation of Scripture within community unified at not only a nation, but also men, women, and children. In this way, there is a consistent unifying theme that can be seen within the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>44</sup> Communal reading is intended to be deeply unifying. Some biblical texts are thought to be written for individuals and not intended for faith communities. For example, Philemon is a book which addresses the complexities and nuances of biblical faith within the confines of problematic societal constructs.

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<sup>41</sup> Nehemiah 8:5-8 (ESV)

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Levering, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Brazos Theological Commentary On the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Deuteronomy 31:11-12 (ESV)

<sup>44</sup> Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, Brazos Theological Commentary On the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 451.



Third and finally, Philemon addresses the issue of the slave and master relationship as it should be understood in light of a common bond in the Christian faith. Although Philemon is written by Paul to an individual, even its introduction alludes to the fact that it will be read within the Christian community.<sup>45</sup> Despite intensely personal relationship which is characterized in the book of Philemon, this text is not be understood as an individual message are to be understood outside at the confines of communal reading. Letters addressed to individuals and recorded in Scripture, have consistent implementation within the community of faith even when they are not fully acknowledged by the passive observer. The communal nature of Scripture reading is evidenced even in New Testament epistles which appear to be directed at the individual.

### Communal Reading of Scripture

The book of Colossians, a powerful letter written to an ancient community of faith, is a poignant example of Scripture which was intended to be read, understood, and applied within the larger church setting. Colossians 4:16 alludes to the fact that although Colossians is addressed to a specific community, it is geared towards a more widespread implementation. Colossians is a biblical text which is intended for a specific community and for many other agent churches simultaneously.<sup>46</sup> It is not enough to demonstrate that communal reading is present within the biblical text, it is furthermore necessary to illustrate how communal reading moves individuals from information to transformation.

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<sup>45</sup> Ernest D. Martin, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Colossians Philemon*, ed. Elmer A. Martens and Willard M. Swartley (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 244-45.

<sup>46</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 278.

### *Communal Reading: From Information to Transformation*

In 2 Chronicles 34:29-30 the Book of the Covenant is opened and read communally under the leadership of King Josiah. For a long period of Israelite history, the Book of the Covenant was neglected by the people. Following the discovery of 2 Chronicles 34:29-30 records the communal gathering around this lost Scripture, writing,

“Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord.”<sup>47</sup>

Following the recovery of the Book of the Covenant by Josiah, there was an essential gathering so that the reading and subsequent contemplation of Scripture would occur in the fellowship.<sup>48</sup> After the gathering and reading had occurred, the reception of communal information was turned into personalized transformation. 2 Chronicles 34:31 records, “And the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.” Nehemiah called his people to know, grow, and show their faith. The public reading of Scripture in 2 Chronicles 34 exemplifies the movement from information to transformation within communities that are willing to embrace the mandates of Scripture together. The communal integration of Scripture reading is

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<sup>47</sup> 2 Chronicles 34:29-30 (ESV)

<sup>48</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary*, ed. Thomas Krüger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 506.

not only demonstrated in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is moreover embodied within the ecclesiological formation in the book of Acts.

### *Communal Reading: The Ecclesiological Formation*

One of the reasons that Acts is an appropriate text for the first SADBS is because of the model that it sets for deep dedication and devotion to scriptural observation within the church. In Acts 2:42-47, following the miraculous move of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Luke provides the reader with a summary statement of the manner in which the community of faith is committed to fostering genuine fellowship and contemplative biblical study.<sup>49</sup> As a result of their commitments, the Lord was pleased to add to their number. This habit of communal and scriptural commitment is not solely included in the opening portions of Acts but is incorporated throughout. In Acts 15 the communal reading of Scripture works to commend others, celebrate Christ, correct doctrine, clarify belief, and unify the early community of faith around the word of God.<sup>50</sup> Whether in the nature of the communicative methodology of scriptural genres, or in the individual examples within the biblical text itself, it is clear that Scripture is meant to be read within community. The Bible is directed toward the hearts and lives of individuals, but it is intended to be observed, studied, and applied within community. Sermon-aligned, community-based biblical studies are a movement to recovery the vibrancy of studying Scripture in unity and togetherness. This communal study, consistently supported in the biblical metanarrative, is not without solidified theoretical foundation as well.

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<sup>49</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary On the New Testament*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary On the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 634.

## Theoretical Foundations

Bloom's Taxonomy has been frequently implemented within the educational sphere to gauge individuals' level of cognition in a certain subject matter or area of focus. The process of assessing varying levels of biblical understanding using Bloom's Taxonomy is not a new theoretical foundation. Specifically, Bart B. Bruehler's article entitled "Traversing Bloom's Taxonomy in an Introductory Scripture Course" epitomizes the utilization of this educational tool for assessment within advanced biblical studies.<sup>51</sup> In many ways, this study can serve as a guide through the theoretical foundation for the study of Bloom's Taxonomy as an assessment tool for the effectiveness of SADBS.

### Bloom's Taxonomy and the Measurement of Spiritual Growth

In Bruehler's application of Bloom's Taxonomy within an introductory Scripture course, it is possible to see various similarities and differences which can be transferrable to this action research project. First, Bruehler has successfully implemented a paradigm for assessing scriptural study using Bloom's taxonomy.<sup>52</sup> With the exception of various cultural and contextual nuances, Bruehler's methodology is partially replicated in this project. He has demonstrated that Bloom's taxonomy is a workable assessment tool in the development and growth of spiritual growth. Second, Bruehler's implementation and scope are implemented within an instrumental case.<sup>53</sup> Studying the participants in this action research project within the LPC Community enabled this researcher to study a specific group in an attempt to address a specific problem and establish a

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<sup>51</sup> Bart B. Bruehler, "Traversing Bloom's Taxonomy in an Introductory Scripture Course." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 21 (2): 92–109. doi:10.1111/teth.12428 (2018), 92.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

theory of practice. In this sense, the action research project would lend itself to an instrumental case.

Third, Bruehler utilizes a variety of undergraduate and adults in his study in order to diversify is sample.<sup>54</sup> The proposed study by this researcher also includes a target audience of various professions and educational backgrounds. The diversification of populations to be studied are mirrored in Buehler's study and that of this researcher. Fourth, Bruehler's setting is an introductory Bible course.<sup>55</sup> Although LPC's ministerial context is not directly tied with formal academia, LPC's core value of "Knowing" is closely connected to the scholastic undercurrent of Buehler's study. Fifth, whereas Bruehler used an exam to establish a person's progression through the hierarchy of Bloom's taxonomy, this applied research is different in its implementation.

The SADBS were paired with surveys rather than exams to gauge an individual's level of participation and growth. Additionally, essay questions were utilized by Bruehler to provide for a more open platform for transparency and greater nuanced clarity. The surveys to be issued to participants in this action research project were included both closed response questions and open response questions. For example, participants will be asked closed response inquiries such as true or false or multiple-choice questions. Moreover, participants will be asked to respond to open questions. Finally, in the concluding portions of Bruehler's study, scatter plots were used to establish the nature of growth given the consistency of information.<sup>56</sup> This applied research project could also use Bloom's taxonomy and the methodology of a series of scatter plots to

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<sup>54</sup> Bruehler, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Bruehler, 98.

track the increased levels of spiritual growth throughout the progression of the study from week one to week seventeen. Utilizing Bruehler's preexistent theoretical foundation, it could be proposed that as participation in SADBS increases the level of spiritual growth as measured by Bloom's taxonomy will do likewise.

Not only is there a consistent need presented within the literature and precedent created throughout the biblical metanarrative, but also there is also a solidified pre-existent theoretical paradigm for implementing Bloom's taxonomy within the realm of advanced biblical studies. In the previous section several similarities for Bruehler's work were presented as a feasible methodology to this applied research project. On the other hand, there are three contextual contrasts between Bruehler's work and this applied research project for this nuanced study to provide valuable contributions within the landscape of contemporary academia.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

When establishing the trustworthiness and reliability of an action research project, it is necessary to clearly outline the problem to be addressed and the manner in which the research will interact with the dilemma. The problem is that individuals who regularly attend a weekly church may experience either a lack of consistent daily Bible reading or a practice of daily Bible reading which is unaligned with the weekend sermon. From the design and dissemination of the SADBS to the evaluation of their effectiveness, this action research project aims to observe, analyze, and synthesize the usefulness of the intervention design described in this chapter. The description of this particular methodology chapter is to detail the intervention design and the implementation of the intervention design. In order to comprehensively detail the project's implementation, it is first necessary to articulate its design. The steps detailed below will be further explained throughout this chapter on project methodology (See Table 3.1 on the following page).

**Table 3.1.** The action steps associated with the project overview and intervention design.

<b>Research Project Overview and Design</b>	
Step 1	Divide Acts 1-7 into seventeen sections of biblical text to be preached in succession.
Step 2	Create seventeen collections of five weekday studies to be aligned with the aforementioned breakdown of text and utilized by participants in the week prior to the sermon.
Step 3	Submit the first four weeks of study to individuals in key church leadership for peer review.
Step 4	Complete revisions in accordance with the peer reviewed feedback.
Step 5	Develop five-week collections of weekly material to be distributed physically and electronically upon the projected launch of the study. In accordance with the seventeen-week timeframe, three five-week groupings should be established and one two-week grouping should be established.
Step 6	Develop a promotional material to be communicated prior to the launch date.
Step 7	Develop survey questions which have questions from varying levels of Bloom's Taxonomy that will be distributed three times during the participant's completion of the study. A pre-study survey, during-study survey, and post-study survey should be designed.
Step 8	Deliver pre-study surveys to participants prior to their participation in the SADBS.
Step 9	Produce physical copies of the SADBS, make materials available on the church website, and on the mobile church app.
Step 10	Distribute the first section of five-week incremented SADBS.
Step 12	Disseminate during-study survey material to participants following the first five weeks of SADBS.
Step 13	Distribute the second set of five-week incremented SADBS.
Step 14	Disseminate during-study survey material for the second time to participants following the conclusion of the tenth week of SADBS.
Step 15	Distribute the third set of five week incremented SADBS.
Step 16	Disseminate during-study survey material to participants for the third time following the conclusion of the fifteenth week of SADBS. Distribute the final two weeks of SADBS.
Step 17	At the conclusion of the seventeenth week of the study, disseminate the post-study survey questions to participants.
Step 18	Formulate focus groups from participants who have completed the SADBS, completed an additional consent form for audio recording, and are willing to provide response feedback through guided discussion.
Step 19	Analyze data and synthesize trends visible in the previously created surveys and focus groups.
Step 20	Deliver a post-study survey, utilizing the levels of cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy to gauge the effect of an individual's participation in the study.



## **Intervention Design**

The intervention design is a detailed description of what was created in order to address the aforementioned problem. This section will be entitled the method for intervention. Within this larger section, this researcher will detail and define the daily Bible studies and communicate the project's initiation within LPC. The intervention design includes a comprehensive explanation of how the results were gathered and assessed for their ability to increase a participant's level of cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy. This section will be entitled the method for evaluation. This section will detail not only the instrumentation that will be used when assessing participants but will also address the validity of using Bloom's Taxonomy as an assessment tool in this particular project. Before the tools for evaluation and instrumentation can be brought into discussion, it is necessary to detail and explain the design of the SADBS and the manner in which they will be delivered to the community at LPC.

### **Method for Intervention**

For a researcher to outline his or her work within the academic community, it is necessary to explain how they addressed a given problem in a verifiable, repeatable manner. This method for intervention will detail what each SADBS was, how they were designed, and how they functioned in the LPC community. Additionally, this method for intervention section will describe how the project was announced and integrated within the LPC community. Prior to a discussion of how the project was supposed to be integrated within the community, each individual study must be assessed within the whole. Primarily, the SADBS need to be comprehensively described and the tools for evaluation also need to be considered. Due to the

amount of content necessary to provide seventeen weeks of studies, the method of intervention will focus most predominantly on the detail and design of the SADBS.

### *The Design of Sermon-Aligned Bible Studies*

The problem described in this researcher's proposed project is an inconsistent or nonexistent biblical study which is aligned in the preached Scripture. In addressing the lack of communally shared biblical study, this researcher has written daily biblical studies which are aligned with the weekend sermon to be integrated into a participant's daily reading.<sup>57</sup> Approaches that seem to integrate communal study with the sermon have often been directed at the sermon itself rather than the passage from which the sermon was derived. This style of daily study has been entitled in the literature review as sermon-based.<sup>58</sup> Rather than use the terminology of the studies being sermon-based, this researcher has described the studies as sermon-aligned. In addition, SADBS precede the preached text, whereas sermon-based studies are necessarily completed following a sermon. The aim of this alternate approach in LPC is not to anchor the studies in the points of the sermon, but in the argumentation and theology that can be found within the biblical text that is to be expositionally preached. For these studies to be understood, a further explanation of design is necessary.

Each week, a participant will be provided with five different studies on the Biblical text which will be preached on the upcoming weekend. As such, a participant who is involved within each of the five days will have spent time in each of his or her weekdays learning about

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<sup>57</sup> Miller, Paul Robert. "Equipping Selected Leaders at Cornerstone Community Church, Chariton, Iowa, with Essential Competencies to Lead Sermon-Based Small Groups". New Orleans, LA: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Harless, Jon. "Transformational Discipleship A Model for Sermon-Based Small Groups For Life Transformation" Lynchburg, Va: Liberty University, 2012.

historical-cultural nuances of the text, the interconnection between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, and certain theological themes which appear within the text. This information will cover the passage to be preached, ancillary texts, and thematic elements which are detailed in the text itself. A more comprehensive description of each day is furthermore necessary.

With the motivation of creating churchwide alignment and consistency within the church community, there are a few components that will be present in each of the five daily studies. Every daily study includes a title (1), an assigned reading (2), two to three paragraphs of explanation (3), a big idea (4), a thematic quote of the day (5), a question and activity (6). These sections will be detailed more comprehensively in a latter portion. This daily breakdown provided consistency throughout each of the studies throughout a seventeen-week period. Acts 1-7 was utilized as the text for these SADBS because of its diversity of content and narrative form.

In the study of Acts 1-7 there are a myriad of expositional and theological topics to be included in titles. For example, Acts 1:1-4 is a section receiving five different daily studies ranging from a discussion of Lukan authorship, the person of Theophilus, the role of reason in faith, the significance of eyewitness accounts, and two arguments for the existence of God.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the subject matter of Acts 1:1-4 is discussed directly and thematically within each of the five days. An individual who participates in each of the five days throughout the week has the opportunity to interact with the biblical text at varying levels under varying themes each day. As such, the title is included in each of the studies to provide the reader with a good idea of the information to follow. In addition to the title (1), each of the daily studies includes an assigned biblical text to read (2), two to three paragraphs of explanation of content (3), a summarizing big idea (4), and a question or activity for the day (5).

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<sup>59</sup> Each of the aforementioned thematic elements are visible in Acts 1:1-4 and were developed as daily content within the sermon aligned daily Bible studies.

First, the participants, after having read the title for that assigned day, will be directed to read the biblical text individually. Ranging from four verses to a chapter of biblical text, the assigned readings either interact with the text to be preached or ancillary texts which appear in the surrounding context of the passage. For example, a participant, in the discussion of Theophilus in Acts, would be led to the Gospel of Luke in order to observe and learn about the significance of this inclusion of audience in Acts 1:1-4. In this way, the participant is being involved in daily reading that is not only integrated with the previous days, but also the passage that will be preached in the week following their study.

Second, after the assigned reading, an individual will be invited to further participate in the aforementioned study of the text and its supporting ideas. The primary tools to engage the reader in the central ideas of the content are the quote of the day and the big idea presented at the conclusion of each daily study. Each of the studies, including their activities and questions should take between five and ten minutes of time depending on an individual's reading speed and comprehension level. Accessibility and common language were chosen as two guiding characteristics in the development of each study.

Third, each day includes a quote or Scripture verse prior to an explanation of content. This researcher is aware of the manner in which some participants will skim material and not read in a contemplative fashion. With this in mind, each study has both the quote of the day and the big idea included in the study to engage the reader who may otherwise be intimidated by a two to three paragraph explanation of the biblical text and its supporting theological themes.

Fourth and finally, each daily study includes an activity or question that welcomes the response of participants following the big idea for the day. Considering the goal of this action research project is to engage the individual in consistently aligned biblical study, the

personalized integration of learned information into further inquiry and action is the culmination of each daily study. Each of the five daily studies can fit within the weekday rhythms of the participants. The studies are complementary, but a participant need not complete a previous day in order to be well-informed during his or her current study. With this in mind, it is furthermore necessary to address how the weeks will be broken down throughout the studies.

In the previously discussed theological framework for this project, the validity of Acts as an appropriate biblical text for this research was argued. Not only do the Acts of the apostles chronicle the events of the early church, but it also presents the opportunity to discuss various elements of ecclesiology. Ecclesiological themes to be discussed in Acts are apologetics, missiology, pneumatology, biblical theology, theology proper, Christology, hamartiology, and several others. These themes from systematic theology will all be addressed as they are visible within the different sections of Acts. The next logical question is: “How are the sections of Acts demarcated into weeks of study?”

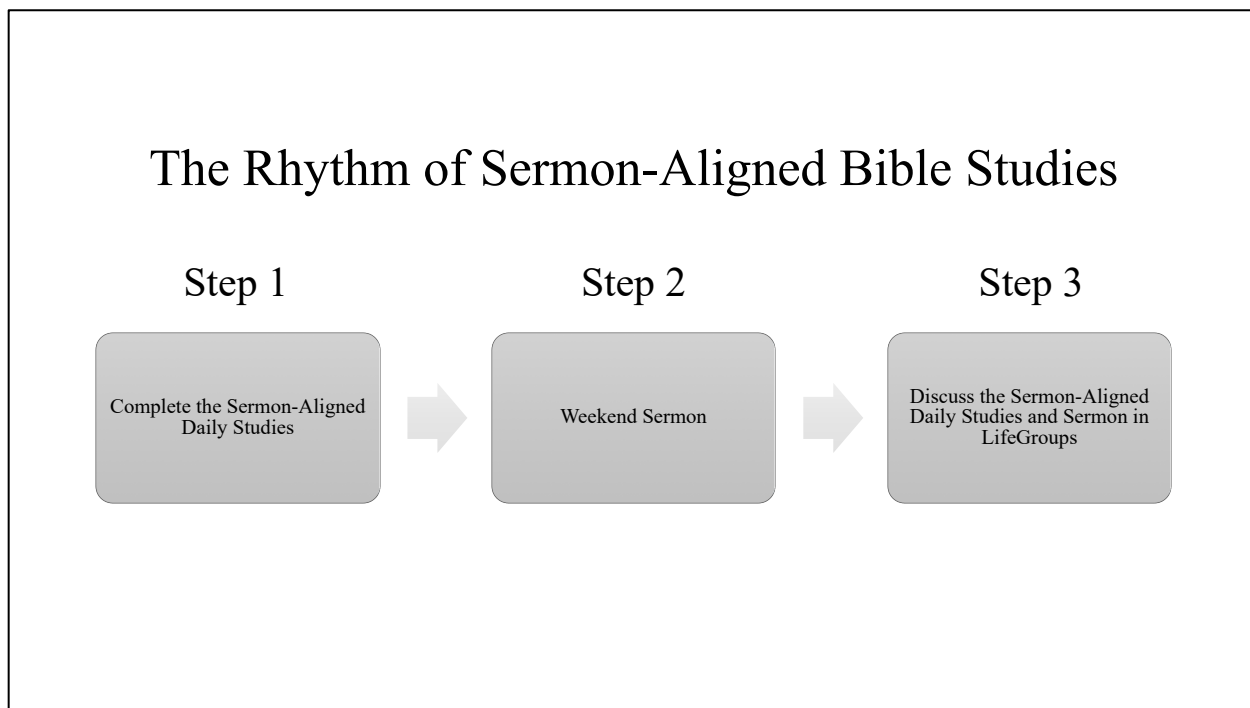
As described previously, this researcher, alongside the lead pastor of LPC, allocated Acts 1-7 and the development of the church until the inclusion of the Apostle Paul in Acts 7, into seventeen weeks of sermonic information. The following text sections correspond to five daily studies each (See Table 3.2 on the next page).

**Table 3.2.** The textual divisions of Acts 1-7 throughout the seventeen-week study.

<b>Weekly Breakdown of Acts 1-7</b>	
<b>Weekday Studies</b>	<b>Weekend Sermon</b>
Week 1: Acts 1:1-4	Sermon 1: Acts 1:1-4
Week 2: Acts 1:5-11	Sermon 2: Acts 1:5-11
Week 3: Acts 1:12-26	Sermon 3: Acts 1:12-26
Week 4: Acts 2:1-13	Sermon 4: Acts 2:1-13
Week 5: Acts 2:14-28	Sermon 5: Acts 2:14-28
Week 6: Acts 2:29-41	Sermon 6: Acts 2:29-41
Week 7: Acts 2:41-47	Sermon 7: Acts 2:41-47
Week 8: Acts 3:1-10	Sermon 8: Acts 3:1-10
Week 9: Acts 3:11-26	Sermon 9: Acts 3:11-26
Week 10: Acts 4:1-12	Sermon 10: Acts 4:1-12
Week 11: Acts 4:13-22	Sermon 11: Acts 4:13-22
Week 12: Acts 4:23-31	Sermon 12: Acts 4:23-31
Week 13: Acts 4:32-5:11	Sermon 13: Acts 4:32-5:11
Week 14: Acts 5:12-42	Sermon 14: Acts 5:12-42
Week 15: Acts 6:1-7	Sermon 15: Acts 6:1-7
Week 16: Acts 6:8-15	Sermon 16: Acts 6:8-15
Week 17: Acts 7:1-60	Sermon 17: Acts 7:1-60

Each of these sections was intentionally divided to align with the flow of Luke through his writing by this researcher and the lead pastor of LPC. The number of studies and their subsequent subject matter are dictated first and foremost by the argumentation, pace, and literary style of Luke in Acts 1-7. As mentioned previously the rhythm for participants will be to read the five studies prior to the weekend service, hear the sermon on the central passage they have previously studied, and discuss the material within their LifeGroup in the week after a sermon is given (See Figure 2 on the next page). This rhythm and the integration of the daily studies in church life will be further described in the next section.

**Figure 2.** The Rhythm of SADBS within the weekday and weekend ministerial flow.



### *The Integration of Daily Studies in the Church*

It is not enough to simply detail what the SADBS are in their substance, it is important to articulate how they are to be integrated into an accountable community within LPC. The strategy for integrating the SADBS in the LPC community will occur within the small group discipleship communities previously labeled as LifeGroups. At the outset of this action research project, each pair of LifeGroup leaders will be asked to participate in these studies to the fullest extent. After completing each of the five weekday studies and hearing the weekend sermon, the LifeGroups will all be asked to use fifteen minutes of their group time to discuss the passage that was preached. The question and activity portions of the previous week's studies will provide a natural connection through which the LifeGroup leaders can encourage their groups to not only participate in the reading of each study, but also implementing them within their daily life. Questions and activities in the SADBS were designed and written in such a way that they can be

readily incorporated into the LifeGroup time. The implementation of five daily studies leading to a sermon on the same central passage is a new strategy for integrated scriptural study into the community.

This new approach functions within the current ministerial paradigm and cultural milieu of LPC. Mainly, the integration of this method for intervention will use preexisting models for ministry and incorporate the SADBS within that which is already functioning in the church. For example, the LifeGroup leaders are already functioning as organizers and catalysts of group gatherings within homes during the week. The daily studies do not usurp the validity and influence of unique LifeGroups, but flourish within the pre-existent biblical learning which is occurring. In December of 2019, as a form of validation, LifeGroup leaders were asked to be a part of the peer review process for the SADBS. LifeGroup leaders were incorporated as a part of the editing process for the SADBS in December of 2019. LifeGroup leaders were requested and selected in September of 2019. These LifeGroups occur throughout a region in the proximity of LPC. With differing demographics and thematic focuses, the LifeGroups meet weekly in either homes or the church. The daily studies can be incorporated into that which is functioning within the church prior to this action research project.

This inclusion of the LifeGroup leaders in the revision of the daily studies increases their immersion in the conception of the studies and catalyzes the ownership of and involvement of each individual within their group. It is important to note that no data was collected for research during this portion of project development. The purpose of this time period of revision was to gain further clarity about stylistic choices for the project. The daily studies were announced to church elders, their wives, and LifeGroup leaders in order to engage church leadership prior to the public announcement and dissemination of material. The manner in which the SADBS will



be distributed will be further detailed in the section entitled the implementation of intervention design. With the explanation of the SADBS and their strategic integration in mind, it is necessary to discuss the method for evaluation proposed by this researcher.

### Method for Evaluation

Considering the fact that this action research project seeks to address a deficiency of consistently aligned daily Bible reading, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy and tools that will be implemented by this researcher. The description herein of evaluation will be allocated into two different subcategories. First, this researcher will describe the tools for instrumentation that are to be used in this project. Second, this researcher will assert the validity of Bloom's Taxonomy as an educational assessment tool that can be of transferrable benefit in the assessment of SADBS. In short, Bloom's Taxonomy will be used as the underlying tool to guide questions which will be implemented within various forms of instrumentation throughout the project in order to track increased growth in cognition.

#### *Instrumentation for Evaluation*

Evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention design can be nuanced and challenging. For the purpose of this action research project, a qualitative approach considering the participant's experience with the SADBS. The aim of evaluation will elicit responses about a participant's level of participation and their perspective throughout the process. In utilizing both focus group responses and survey materials to track an individual's progress through Bloom's Taxonomy, this researcher will employ mixed methods data collection. The naturalistic inquiry

will be assessed through two primary tools: focus groups and surveys. Within this description, further explanation is required.

Focus groups will be an overarching tool of instrumentation for evaluation before, during, and after a participant's experience with the SADBS. Within the larger category of a focus group, there is a fair amount of flexibility. Focus groups will be recorded and transcribed before, during and after the research process by this researcher. With that in mind, there are a variety of styles of focus groups.

First, this researcher will use semi-structured conversational times with participants who completed the SADBS at the conclusion of the seventeen-week period. A semi-structured focus group asks pointed questions in a specific order and observe the individual's response. Although this style of conducting a focus group is not completely free, it does use the responses of the individual to craft subsequent questions. Questions about a participant's level of participation will be left for the more impersonal survey material, as the semi-structured focus groups capitalize on the nuance of their experience with the studies. In this way, they will be asked to engage with questions about their own growth during and following the seventeen-week period.

Second, this researcher will use open-ended focus groups in which the strategy is more fluid and dictated by the response of the participants. Through the process of completing the daily studies, participants will already be observing written documents and the open-ended focus groups process will allow for an even fuller range of individualized response. This researcher is aware, however, that certain participant's responses will be altered in light of relational nuance and feasible ancillary pressure. In light of this estimation, this action research project will also utilize surveys to evaluation the effectiveness of the intervention design.

Surveys will be made available to all participants prior to, during, and after their involvement with the daily Bible studies. Surveys will be accessible via the website, the LPC app, and email. The surveys will gauge a person's level of participation within the SADBS and also include various questions which gauge growth, stagnation, or regression which occurs in their ability to read daily and understand at increasing levels. Surveys provide a more impersonal methodology for data collection that enables participants to provide more transparent and unfiltered communication about the process. Multiple choice questions are presented to ascertain their level of participation. Multiple choice questions are developed to assess a participant's rote memory and retention of biblical information. Open-ended questions are utilized to critically assess participants' progression in the levels of cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy. It is herein necessary to identify the role of Bloom's Taxonomy within the intervention design.

### *The Role of Bloom's Taxonomy within the Intervention Design*

As discussed in the literature review portion of this action research project, Bloom's Taxonomy is an educational assessment tool which has been previously been implemented within the context of an introductory hermeneutics course. Bloom's Taxonomy creates a hierarchy of understanding from the simplicity of rote memory to the complexity of new creation in the light of newly understood realities. In short, Bloom's Taxonomy is a tool used to assess whether an individual is growing in his or her ability to not only learn, but also apply a given subject matter. Both in the qualitative methodology of this project and the various tools of instrumentation, Bloom's Taxonomy is a helpful tool. It helps to craft varying levels of questions that gauge a person's level of cognitive growth as a result of participating in daily studies which are aligned in the text to be preached. When considering the purpose of this action research

project to address a deficiency in consistently aligned daily Scripture reading, Bloom's Taxonomy is an underlying tool which will inform the focus groups and survey questions alike.

In surveys, the first question will ask participants to report how many of the previous week's studies they completed. The second question will originate from one of the first three levels of cognitive understanding in Bloom's Taxonomy. The third open response question will be used to qualitatively assess a person's level of understanding within one or more of the levels of cognition in Bloom's Taxonomy. Similarly, the transcripts of focus groups will be brought into conversation with key identifiers visible within the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Not only is there a variety of instrumentation tools, but there is an underlying, cohesive methodology of Bloom's Taxonomy within the evaluation of individual's progression. With the intervention design established, it is necessary to describe the implementation of the intervention design.

### **Implementation of Intervention Design**

Portions of the implementation have been discussed briefly in the discussion of the intervention design, but the specific development and application require further description. For the purpose of this project, implementation will be allocated into the description of specific procedures and a timeline for project completion. Specific procedures can be further divided into subsections of material distribution and the development of materials. Additionally, the discussion of the timeline for project completion can be subdivided into the timeframe for completion and project-related complications.

## Project Procedures

Projects that are well-designed are not only tactfully planned, but purposefully implemented. The form of a well-planned action research project is often understood as a project procedure or underlying process. For a project that requires the massive development, consolidation, revision, and communication of materials, specific processes are required. In the following sections the process of material distribution and a timeframe for development will be detailed with lucid brevity.

### *Materials Distribution*

One of the logical questions that accompanies the development of seventeen sets of five daily studies involves how communication and distribution of materials will maintain consistency throughout the duration of the project. Both in the initiation of the project and its maintenance throughout, careful attention is required. Strategically, the SADBS will be launched on April 12, 2020 which is Easter Sunday. SADBS will be made available on the LPC website, the church's mobile application, and through bi-weekly email communications.

Not only is Easter one of the historically high Sunday's for attendance, but it also provides several months that are necessary for the development of the studies and their revision. Additionally, Easter Sunday is a theologically reasoned date to initiate the project for the church community. Simply put, Acts 1-7 and the development of the early church occurs in the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus which is specifically celebrated on Easter. The tangible application of Easter Sunday and the work of moving information to transformation pairs well with Easter. This pairing will be further detailed under the section entitled, "Timeline for Project

Completion.” Before the timeline for data collection can be established, it is necessary to discuss the development of materials.

### *Materials Development*

The development of five daily studies that are anchored in selected and divided texts from Acts 1-7 is not done easily or quickly. It involves extensive planning, consistent revision, and the willingness to communicate theological truth with lucid brevity. For this research project, the procedures guiding the development of materials are of the utmost importance. This researcher briefly discussed the desire to include LPC elders, their wives, and the LifeGroup leaders in the process of peer revision in December of 2019 necessitates a development of materials months prior to their implementation. This researcher has devoted every Monday to the development of SADBS. In order to maintain not only the communication of these studies of the biblical text, but, foundationally, their development, this project necessitates the initial development of material four months prior to its integration within community. For example, studies that will be initiated within the LPC community in April of 2020 is written and submitted for revision in late November of 2019. In this way, the LifeGroup leaders have a chance to contribute to the revision of the studies that will influence their community and subsequent changes can be completed.

### Timeline for Project Completion

LifeGroups and their leaders will be used as the primary form of accountability in order to keep participants engaged in the larger work of studying Scripture in Christian community. LifeGroups will function as a consistent touch point for the studies within the LPC community.

A video promotion and description of the materials are to be presented on April 12, 2020 which will lead to five studies and the start of Acts 1:1-4 on April 19, 2020. The commencement date is purposeful, but the communication of materials is equally as intentional. Physical copies of the studies will be distributed in four-week sets starting on April 12, 2020.

### *Timeframe for Project Completion*

The physical copies of SADBS will include a progress sheet so that a participant can track their progress through the first twenty studies. A launch will be initiated through the sermonic application on Easter, distributed through various communicative platforms, and promoted through the LifeGroups. Approvals for the strategic promotion of the SADBS has been acquired from the lead pastor and elder board. With the length and breadth of this study in mind, there are a few complications that ought to be addressed regarding the implementation of the intervention design.

### *Project-Related Complications*

When a project is predicated on seventeen weeks of five daily studies, immediate questions of dropout and apathy occur. Simply put, many participants will arguably reduce their participation throughout the duration of the research and data collection. This project apathy is carefully addressed in the design and implementation of the intervention design. First, in the process of signing up for the daily Bible studies a participant will agree to be included in further communications about how to improve the materials and to contribute to a church wide study of the study's effectiveness. From the very outset, the LPC community will be made aware that they are invited to become a part of learning and training other similar communities who are

committed to learning and growing through the study of Scripture. Although participants will not be required to be in a focus group as a part of their involvement, all will be asked to complete at least three surveys to be distributed before, during, and after the action research project. Within each survey there will be a component that gauges how often an individual is participating in the studies. In this way, they are self-reporting their level of apathy or dropout. It is not only the participants that need self-assessment, however.

One of the complications that arises through a qualitative study in a community to which the researcher belongs, and for whom the researcher desires a positive increase in cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy is personal bias. Throughout the duration of the research project, from its inception to completion, this researcher will complete a journal to take comprehensive notes on personal bias and any potential project-related complications that are of personal significance. Considering that the research is not completed in a relational vacuum, a journal detailing this researcher's bias is of the utmost importance.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

Based upon the theoretical and theological underpinnings of Chapter 2 and the implementation design detailed in Chapter 3, this chapter presents the results discovered through the intervention design. Although the SADBS's were complete, the IRB was progressing toward the project approval, and a legitimate timeframe was established, an international health crisis disabled the project's implementation. The interruption of a global pandemic within the projected timeframe for implementation caused several adjustments that were necessary for this project. It is the aim of this chapter, therefore, to integrate the work of precedent literature within the presumptive results for this project. Prior to the discussion of these results and the detailed steps of data analysis, a succinct disclaimer and further explanation concerning this unforeseen development is in order.

### **The Interruption of COVID-19**

The first week of SADBS was set to commence on April 19, 2020. Every facet of the project was ready to begin. Although the project was fully prepared, March 2020 came with its own unique set of challenges which impacted the community of LPC. Only weeks before the projected launch date, it became clear that LPC was not going to be able to physically gather for weekend services due to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, also known as COVID-19. By March 15, 2020, LPC was restricted to the digital distribution and communication of the weekend service. The small group communities known as LifeGroups were forced to cancel meetings and all physical gathering at the LPC building was stopped. Through the remainder of March and April, Texas was placed on a stay-at-home order by Governor Greg Abbot. As a

result of these developments, the church was unable to physically gather during the time in which this action research project was scheduled to begin.

During the social distancing restrictions of COVID-19, only businesses which were classified as essential were allowed to continue functioning in their normal capacity. LifeGroup communities, staff meetings, counseling sessions, weekend services, youth groups, and children's ministries were relegated to distanced and digital communication. The entirety of LPC was impacted by the unforeseen complications due to COVID-19. The unpredictable nature of this pandemic made it a challenge to implement the project for several months. The need to cancel the launch of SADBS on April 19, 2020 became apparent.

This unpredicted and altogether unexpected development in the spring of 2020 debilitated the action research project in a few different ways. First, the SADBS became far more complicated to disseminate. As a result of social distancing restrictions, the physical distribution of SADBS was no longer possible. Second, the SADBS were designed to be integrated within the LifeGroups which meet homes throughout the LPC communities. The nuanced dynamics of COVID-19 kept these small groups from physically gathering and impaired the integration of SADBS within LifeGroup discussion. The researcher planned to study the impact of LifeGroup attendance on an individual's level of participation with the SADBS and supposed spiritual growth according to Bloom's Taxonomy. This strategy became impossible with the cancellation of LifeGroups. Third, weekend services were moved from the physical LPC location to platforms for online communication such as YouTube, Facebook, and the Go LPC Mobile Application. Attendance in weekend services and LifeGroups were both dimensions of participation which were intended to be utilized by this researcher to stratify the data received throughout the project. Finally, the distanced communication posed serious challenges for

effectively promoting the launch of the study. The SADBS were scheduled to strategically begin during the weekend following Easter of 2020. The unpredicted and unprecedented movement to exclusively online gatherings would have made it impossible for this researcher to gather data without violating the fundamental parameters for data collection and intervention design.

After assessing the spiritual needs of those in LPC and the chaotic nature of the world around them, it became apparent that a renewed strategy for sermons was needed. Instead moving into a study of Acts 1-7 and the development of the early church, this researcher, alongside the Lead Pastor, decided that an expository series from the Psalms would best meet the spiritual needs of those in LPC. In response to COVID-19, the Lead Pastor and this researcher developed a series entitled “Take Heart: Finding Comfort in the Psalms.” The spiritual needs and situational challenges severely challenged the feasibility of this project as it was previously designed. The methodological focus of LPC switched from an emphasis upon the development of the early church in Acts 1-7 to the daily practice of caring for those within the community. It was not only impossible to launch the project as it was initially planned, but it was not the appropriate timing for such an endeavor.

These nuanced situations and cancellations interfered significantly with this researcher’s ability to implement the intervention design, instrumentation, and the data collection as a whole. As a result of these events which occurred beyond the control of this researcher, the following information that will be presented is presumptive data that would have been received upon the conclusion of this action research project. Simply stated, the information presented within the remainder of this chapter is a description of plausible data that would have been collected and the manner in which it would have been analyzed. The following portions of this thesis will present reasonable, theoretical results and conclusions from presumptive data. With those situational

complexities in mind, it is necessary to once again visit the aim of the project before the data can be stratified, examined, and analyzed.

### **Aim of the Project Revisited**

As stated in introduction of this thesis, the aim of this project is to study the effects of SADBS on an individual's level of spiritual growth. One of the fundamental assertions visible within the precedent literature was the formidable influence that daily scriptural study has on an individual's spiritual growth.<sup>60</sup> In the literature review portion of this thesis, Bloom's Taxonomy was presented as an assessment tool which has been utilized to measure growth as it intersects with scriptural study.<sup>61</sup> Bruehler's study demonstrated the validity of assessing individual's growth using Bloom's Taxonomy in biblical academia. Based on the validity of Bloom's Taxonomy as an educational assessment tool and the example demonstrated by Bruehler, the methodological foundation for this project was initiated. The SADBS were created as a transferrable resource, reproducible for other biblical texts, that would help individuals grow in their understanding and application Scripture in everyday life.<sup>62</sup> This connection from the precedent literature would have been further explored in this action research project. In order to stratify, examine, and analyze this growth, the data would have been carefully processed using Bloom's Taxonomy.

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<sup>60</sup> Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape our Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: (Baker Academic, 2017), 151.

<sup>61</sup> Bart B. Bruehler, "Traversing Bloom's Taxonomy in an Introductory Scripture Course." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 21 (2): 92–109. doi:10.1111/teth.12428 (2018), 92.

<sup>62</sup> Gary A. Parrett, and Steve Kang. *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 242.

First, a participant's growth within each of the six levels of cognition in Bloom's Taxonomy would have been observed. For example, an individual could grow in their ability to remember biblical content in the study (Level 1; Bloom's Taxonomy) and not grow in their ability to apply that biblical content (Level 3; Bloom's Taxonomy). That participant's potential growth occurred within one specific level of Bloom's Taxonomy. Second, a participant's growth from one level of cognition to another was observed. As detailed through the description of intervention design in Chapter 3, the instrumentation for this study was designed to gauge a participant's level of spiritual growth through 5 surveys. In its totality, this project was predicated on the connection between participation and growth. In order to detail the presumptive data regarding growth according to Bloom's Taxonomy, it was first necessary to stratify projected results into various levels of participation. A few operational definitions are necessary before different levels of participation and growth can be analyzed.

### **Operational Definitions**

The varying levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were the assessment tool which was utilized by this researcher to gauge a participant's level of growth. The validity of this approach was previously asserted in the discussion of Bloom's Taxonomy and the nature of spiritual growth in Chapter 2. The levels of cognition and growth in Bloom's Taxonomy are relatively clear. In order to observe the presumptive data in this project, it was important to categorize individual's based upon various levels of participation prior to their assessment for growth.<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup> UGUR, Hasan, Petru-Madalin CONSTANTINESCU, and Michael J. STEVENS. 2015. "Self-Awareness and Personal Growth: Theory and Application of Bloom's Taxonomy." *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, no. 60 (Summer): 96. doi:10.14689/ejer.2015.60.6.

presumptive data would have been broken into groups depending on an individual's participation. This researcher classified and stratified individual's in this research project into either high, medium, or low levels of participation. When considering varying degrees of participation made by this research, the levels may, at first, appear subjective and arbitrary. Based upon the results that would have been received, this stratification could have been handled in different ways. Overarchingly, the data sets would have been allocated into different levels of participation in order to isolate the specific influence of participation on spiritual growth. The division of individuals by their varying degrees of SADBS completion was a necessary prerequisite needed for contemplative data collection. The connection between participation and growth is the fundamental thrust of this the thesis. It follows, therefore, that while this allocation was necessary for data analysis, it necessitates further explanation.

If it is left undefined, the ideas of participation and growth wander into obscurity and subjectivity. There are any number of things that could be utilized to measure a person's involvement within an experiment or action research project. This researcher could have primarily observed an individual's participation in LifeGroups or weekend church services. In addition, a secondary level of stratification would have been implemented. For example, data sets could have primarily divided the data sets by age, gender, or self-reported, preexistent cognitive maturity according to Bloom's Taxonomy. All of this information would have been gathered during the surveys distributed before, during, and after the study. Each of the facets of data collection are worthy of assessment. All of the aforementioned criteria were brought into discussion by this researcher, but they were not the primary focus. This ancillary information would have been a secondary area of analysis after participants were allocated into groups based upon their completion of the SADBS.

It follows that if the aim of this study was to observe the connection between participation and growth then this researcher would have initially limited the scope of a participant's level of engagement to his or her completion of SADBS. An initial question would have been asked to initiate the first separation of participants. How often did an individual in the study participate in the SADBS? In other words, to what extent was an individual involved in the reading and response portions of the SADBS? This analysis could not measure an individual's qualitative experience or contribution within the SADBS and LifeGroup environment, but it would have provided a framework for general breaks between different participants. This separation would have been integral for this researcher's ability to highlight a correlation between participation and other measurable data. This correlation will be discussed in a later portion of this chapter. Discussion concerning these further subcategories is entitled secondary stratification beyond participation. The self-reported, quantitative measurement of an individual's interaction with SADBS would have begun the formation of measurable lines upon which participants would have been separated.

As stated previously, individuals would have split into high, medium, and low levels of participation based on their degree of involvement with SADBS. This data would have been collected utilizing 5 surveys and a potential focus group at the conclusion of the study. These instrumentation tools are visible in Appendix A of this thesis project. For the sake of consistency and clarity, this researcher chose to clearly identify standards upon which the data sets would be divided into sections. Without having been able to run this study as an action research project in real world application, these participatory allocations are presumptive divisions that would have plausibly taken place.

The subsection of individuals who classified as high-level participants would have had to meet or exceed frequent levels of participation in SADBS. For the purposes of the study, a high-level participant was an individual who attended 80% or more of the SADBS that were distributed and active during the seventeen-week trial period. With 5 SADBS provided to individuals weekly, an individual would need to average the complete 4 or more studies until the conclusion of the study. The rigorous consistency associated with this level of involvement would have been the guiding factor in whether or not a person classified as a high-level or medium-level participant. The goal of separating participants into respective groupings would have been to highlight individuals who heavily engaged with the content, those who interacted at a minimal level with the SADBS, and everyone in between.

Although the stratification of individuals into varying degrees of participation would not have, in and of itself, provide this researcher with qualitative evidence of a person's level of contribution, it would have provided a qualitative hierarchy from which the data sets could have been accurately assessed for statistical trends. High, medium, and low distinctions, though somewhat arbitrary, are helpful in order to apportion the sample size. In order to better illustrate the differing categories, a Participation Matrix has been developed and presented below to clarify the stratification detailed previously (Table 4.1 on the next page).



**Table 4.1** Participation Matrix (SADBS)<sup>64</sup>

Participation Matrix (SADBS)			
	High-Level Participant	Medium-Level Participant	Low-Level Participant
OPTION 1: SADBS Participation (%)	80-100% Participation	70-79% Participation	60-69% Participation
OPTION 2: SADBS Participation (%)	67-100% Participation	34-66% Participation	0-33% Participation
OPTION 3: SADBS Participation (%)	Top 1/3 of Participants	Middle 1/3 of Participants	Bottom 1/3 of Participants
Participation Summary	Frequent	Consistent	Inconsistent

To clarify, this researcher would have utilized one of the three options presented in the Participation Matrix below. The separation of individuals based upon their level of participation would have been the principal stratification that would have occurred prior to other focuses of data analysis. Because the project was not able to be implemented due to the aforementioned reasons, one specific methodology for stratifying participation was not chosen over another.

Without having received data due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing restrictions, what follows continues to be presumptive upon the conclusion of the study. What follows in this portion of Chapter 4 continues to be a statement of how this researcher would have managed the data and analyzed results. The categorization of individuals into the different levels participatory status would have been the initial stage used to breakdown the data. There would have been several steps to follow in order to answer the question, “How did an

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<sup>64</sup> This chart details the possible stratifications of individuals based upon their levels of participation present throughout the duration of the study. All three options would have been explored, but one method for data analysis would have been primarily explored.

individual's participation in SADBS increase their spiritual growth?" This researcher will therefore present the presumptive steps for data analysis, secondary stratification beyond the participation levels, the integration of focus group discussions, potential outliers, and plausible trends that would have been observed.

### **Presumptive Steps for Data Analysis**

Upon the completion of the seventeen-week study period, this researcher would have gathered the survey questions and focus group discussion. The methods for this researcher's data collection were detailed in Chapter 3. The primary tools utilized to gather data would have been a collection of surveys and an optional focus group for participants who completed the seventeen-week study. The surveys given during the study would have been disseminated at the end of the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth weeks of the study. Although this researcher would have collected, observed, and securely stored this data, the aforementioned participation groupings would not have been separated and furthermore analyzed until the study had reached its conclusion. These self-reported surveys would have been the guiding factor in separating individuals into varying participation groups.

After individuals would have been split into groups according to their participation levels, this researcher would have begun to analyze their growth according to Bloom's Taxonomy. First, this researcher would have evaluated the pre-study surveys that would have been distributed following the recruitment and signed consent of a participant. These pre-study surveys would have gathered information concerning an individual's gender, age, preexistent habits of daily Bible study, and their level of involvement in LPC. More fundamentally, these surveys would have asked questions to highlight an individual's level of cognition on Bloom's

Taxonomy as it pertains to their understanding of Scripture. For example, in the pre-study survey a participant would have been asked a series of questions that stem from varying levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.<sup>65</sup> The purpose of these questions would have been two-fold. First, these questions would have highlighted a participant's cognitive level prior to the study. Second, these questions would have highlighted the nuance of each participant within the respective level of cognition according to Bloom's Taxonomy. For example, two participants could have begun the study and self-identified within the second stratification of Bloom's Taxonomy. These participants would have technically self-identified within the same level of cognition, but experienced varying degrees of cognition within the level itself. Each of the surveys would have maintained a foundational connection to the assessment questions in Bloom's Taxonomy, while giving the participant an opportunity to disclose the varying degrees and nuances that exist within each of the six levels of cognition. A participant's pre-study surveys would have been utilized to establish their starting level on Bloom's Taxonomy. Once this researcher would have gathered the Bloom's Taxonomy starting level, it would have been possible to start the process of calculating growth.

### **Calculating Growth on Bloom's Taxonomy**

In order to accurately describe the process of calculating growth, a few fundamental terms need to be defined. First, an individual's "start level" refers to their self-identified position on Bloom's Taxonomy prior to the study. This information was gathered through the pre-study survey and directly relates to their cognition in relationship to scriptural comprehension. Second,

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<sup>65</sup> Maureen Hemmings, "Using Bloom's Taxonomy in Primary Religious Education." *Religious Education Journal of Australia* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2011), 42.

an individual's "end level" refers to their self-identified position on Bloom's Taxonomy following to the study. This data would have been collected throughout the during-study surveys. Ultimately, this data would have been collected and analyzed at the end of the seventeen-week period and the post-study survey. With both the "start level" and "end level" in mind, it is important to succinctly define the terminology utilized in relationship to growth calculation.

The growth experienced from the beginning to the conclusion of the study would have been analyzed in two initial ways. This researcher would have measured numerical change and percentage change. Numerical change refers to the direct growth of an individual from one level of Bloom's Taxonomy to the next. This change measurement would have been calculated by subtracting the "start level" from the "end level" in order to be provided with the numerical difference. For example, if an individual would have begun the study at a "start level" of 2 on Bloom's Taxonomy and concluded the study with an "end level" of 3 using the same metrics, this participant would have experienced a numerical change of 1. Percentage change is an additional method that would have been utilized to calculate a participant's change from the beginning and end of the study. This change measurement would have been calculated by subtracting the "start level" from the "end level" and dividing that total by the "start level." For example, if the same individual would have begun the study at a "start level of 2 on Bloom's Taxonomy and concluded the study with an "end level" of 3 using the same metrics. This participant would have experienced a change of 50%. Without having been able to implement the real-world study, both methods for growth calculation could have been utilized to see which best described the development that transpired. These calculations would have been implemented to track trends of growth within the high, medium, and low levels of participation (See Table 4.2 on the next page).

**Table 4.2** Calculating Numerical and Percentage Growth

Calculating Numerical and Percentage Growth	
	Growth Calculations (Bloom's Taxonomy)
<b>Numerical Change</b>	Bloom's End Level (-) Bloom's Start Level (=) Numerical Change
<b>Percentage Change</b>	Bloom's End Level (-) Bloom's Start Level (/) Bloom's Start Level (=) Percentage Change
	Sample Growth Calculations (Bloom's Taxonomy)
<b>Numerical Change (Participant A)</b> Start Level = 2 End Level = 3	Level 3 (-) Level 2 (=) Numerical Change of 1
<b>Percentage Change (Participant A)</b> Start Level = 2 End Level = 3	Level 3 (-) Level 2 (/) Level 3 (=) Percentage Change of .50

The growth calculations would have been implemented in order to study trends which were made visible through the data collection. This researcher would have gathered a participant's survey answers regarding their self-perceived growth as it was visible throughout the study period. Utilizing their level of participation and interaction with the SADBS, the researcher would have observed, recorded, and analyzed visible trends that appear within each of participatory data sets. This researcher would have sought to analyze correlation between

participation and an individual's perceived level of growth from one level of Bloom's Taxonomy to the next. The survey materials were designed using a Likert scale in order to give participant's a chance to voice the different gradations of growth and progress that they could have experienced.<sup>66</sup> Using what is known about growth, participation, and Bloom's Taxonomy, a few logical assumptions can be made about presumptive results that would have been experienced.

Although there would have undoubtedly been variants in the data sets, it is expected that a correlation between participation and growth on Bloom's Taxonomy would have been made consistently visible. For example, those who were categorized within the upper echelon of participation would have been expected to see the most considerable growth within the stages of Bloom's Taxonomy and from one cognitive level to the next. It follows that participants who demonstrated a medium level of participation would have been expected to generally experience marginal levels of growth. Finally, those who demonstrated low levels of participation would have been expected to possess minimal levels of increase according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Participation and growth were the two fundamental dimensions of analysis, but there would have been several measurable components that would have been utilized as a secondary form of data analysis.

This researcher would have expected a solidified correlation between participation levels and growth trends. An individual who fit within the high-level category of participation would be expected to experience the greatest amount of growth visible within Bloom's Taxonomy. An individual who fit within the medium-level category of participation would be expected to experience less growth than the upper echelon, but more than a lower-level participant. Beyond

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<sup>66</sup> Norman, Geoff. "Likert Scales, Levels of Measurement and the "laws" of Statistics." *Advances in Health Sciences Education* 15, no. 5 (2010): 625-632.

the analysis of participation and growth, this researcher would have employed additional qualitative assessments as a secondary form of stratification. These measurable components can be broadly categorized into an individual's attendance, demographical characteristics, and preexistent spiritual maturity.

### **Secondary Stratification Beyond Participation**

In order to maintain lucid brevity and clarity, this researcher will succinctly describe ancillary stratification of data analysis. It is important to keep in mind that each facet of secondary stratification would have been analyzed regarding its correlation with the primary area of study which would have been participation. Participation level stratifications would have been the primary separation of data. Individual attendance, demographical characteristics, and preexistent spiritual maturity would have been assessed for their connectivity and correlation with participation levels. First, an individual's attendance would have been subdivided into their weekly presence in both a LifeGroup community and at the weekend services. For those who consistently attended LifeGroup and weekend services, it could be logically assumed that they would glean more from the studies and experience spiritual growth in the process. Discussion in the small group setting would have presumably correlated tightly with an individual's spiritual growth.<sup>67</sup> As a result of biblical discussion within the LifeGroup communities, meaningful growth would have been expected for consistent attendees even if they did not display exceptional levels of participation with the SADBS. After completing a secondary analysis in

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<sup>67</sup> Welch, Marshall and Marshall Welch. "Manifestation of the Spirit: An Investigation on the Impact of a Curriculum and Small Group Spiritual Direction on the Spiritual Formation of Protestant Men." *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2013): 81-99.

association with a participant's attendance, specific demographical characteristics would have been considered.

An individual's demographical characteristics would have been isolated according to a participant's age and gender. Finally, in the pre-study survey that was designed an individual would have been asked to disclose their daily Bible reading habits, comprehension of biblical truth, and ministerial involvement. Although these factors do not fully incapsulate or define an individual's level of spiritual maturity prior to the study, they would have been used to provide the researcher with an idea of an individual's preexisting spiritual maturity. An individual's attendance would have been the initial focus of secondary stratification and data analysis.

Following this analysis, this researcher would have used the data to note any correlation between participation and attendance. The researcher would have asked a two primary questions of the data. First, how did a participant's attendance at LifeGroup correlate with their ability to complete the SADBS. Second, how did a participant's presence at LifeGroup correlate with their attendance at a LPC weekend service. The application of this study would have potentially explored the connection between communal accountability and an individual's level of participation, learning, and growth.<sup>68</sup> Good evidence for the connection between communal influence and individualized spiritual growth was presented in the literature review portions of this work. Additionally, In this secondary evaluation of data, this researcher would expect to see a correlation between an individual's attendance in the LPC community and their quantitative participation in the SADBS. This aspect of the research would have been one of the questions that would have been discussed in the focus groups. This researcher would have asked about participant's perceived connection between attendance in the LPC community and their ability to

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<sup>68</sup> Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape our Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: (Baker Academic, 2017), 151.



complete SADBS. This researcher would have expected to observe a clear correlation between an individual's attendance in a LifeGroup and their completion of SADBS. The more frequently a person attended LifeGroup would have correlated with their participation level. Additionally, this researcher would have expected to see some correlation between weekend church experience and participation in SADBS. Although attendance cannot purely describe the quality of a participant's experience, the correlation between involvement, participation, and ultimately growth would have been observed through this study.

After studying the connectivity between attendance and participation, this researcher would have delved into two primary demographical characteristics. The two characteristics that would have been observed and assessed in this study are a participant's age and gender. First, this researcher would have broken the participants into differing age ranges without moving them from their preexisting participation level groupings. This researcher would have recorded and presented any correlation between an individual's age and their level of participation. Second, the researcher would have evaluated the correlation between an individual's gender and their ability to consistently participate in the SADBS. It should be noted that there would have been a myriad of factors that influence an individual's ability to complete the SADBS. A participant's socio-economic status, employment, and family dynamic are just a few demographical characteristics that could have been discussed but were not chosen for this study. This stratification would have asked how a participant's age and gender related to their participation and subsequent, presumptive spiritual growth.

After observing and examining an individual's attendance and demographical characteristics, this researcher would have analyzed the data set by assessing preexistent spiritual maturity. For example, based on the calculations for spiritual growth presented earlier in this

chapter, an individual who is at a higher level on Bloom's Taxonomy would have a lower potential for percentage growth. Feasibly, an individual who possessed a robust, preexistent spiritual maturity prior to the study may have self-identified their knowledge of Scripture with the fifth level of Bloom's Taxonomy. This data would have been collected through the pre-study survey. As such, their quantitative room for growth according to Bloom's Taxonomy would be numerically limited. Although they would have potentially continued to experience qualitative growth visible in their survey responses, the individual with preexistent spiritual maturity would have influenced the growth trends within their participation level groups. The influence of this participant type would have been proactively counterbalanced as the final focus of secondary stratification.

After this researcher had followed each of the previous steps of data analysis, individuals who identified with the fourth level of Bloom's Taxonomy or higher would have been separated. Two participant groups would have been created. Participants who self-identified with the first, second and third levels of Bloom's Taxonomy would have been split from those who self-identified with those who self-identified with the fourth, fifth, and sixth levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. It should be noted that many individuals would have presumably and inappropriately identified with the fourth, fifth and sixth levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Whether through ignorance, pride, or any number of factors, this researcher acknowledges that many people may have miscategorized themselves prior to the study. This issue of self-reporting will be further discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

After this division was created, this researcher would have processed the results again to observe presumptive trends in the data. This researcher acknowledges the possibility that individuals who possessed preexistent spiritual maturity may not have experienced self-reported

growth through the SADBS. This nuance would have been expected but would have been a presumed outlier to the overall correlation of growth. Primarily, this researcher would have expected the trends of growth to be drastically increased for the data set which had the individuals with a preexistent, robust spiritual maturity removed from analysis. Although individuals with preexistent spiritual maturity would have been expected to experience a depth of growth through the study in relationship to their participation level, their progression would not have appeared as clearly using the calculation for growth that was presented earlier in this chapter. In each of the aforementioned results, there is a numerical quantitative component. At this point in the data analysis, the researcher would have turned to the qualitative collection of results which would have been made available through focus group discussion.

### **Integration of Focus Group Discussions**

Although this researcher would have expected a clear correlation between participation and growth to have been made visible through the survey materials, additional qualitative data would have been needed in order to solidify the experience of individuals. With this in mind, focus groups would have been executed to gauge the qualitative experience and growth according to the participants. This time for guided group discussion would have provided individuals with the opportunity to give feedback concerning their own experience and participation with the SADBS. Additionally, this focus group time would have given participants the opportunity to express their understanding of the connection between biblical information and spiritual transformation.

For individuals who completed the studies and surveys, there would have been two voluntary focus group times offered at LPC. The focus group discussion would have been a 45 to

60-minute discussion led by this researcher and it would have sought answers to five primary questions. The entirety of the discussion would have been recorded and its manuscript would have been recorded in this thesis. The five primary questions were succinct and would have provided a nuanced understanding of participant's feelings toward the implementation and effects of SADBS. Below are the five primary questions that would have been asked of participants in the focus group.

Primary Focus Group Questions:

1. Do you feel that the daily studies helped participants turn information into spiritual transformation? Why or why not?
2. In your opinion, did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies increase your ability to understand and apply Scripture? Why or why not.
3. How would you describe your experience with the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies?
4. How would you describe the connection between spiritual growth and scriptural study?
5. What would you suggest as improvements for future sermon-aligned studies?

If time allowed, this researcher would have asked ancillary questions to further probe into some dimensions of the project. Below are the five ancillary questions that would have been asked of participants if there was time remaining in the focus group session.

Ancillary Focus Group Questions:

1. What are some of the benefits experienced through the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies?

2. Did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies influence your spiritual growth? Why or why not?
3. How did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies influence your ability to apply biblical truth in everyday life?
4. Do you think there is substantial difference in the benefit associated with the church sharing collective biblical learning when compared to an individualistic approach to biblical study? Why or why not?
5. As a result of the study, were you able to make connections to other portions of the biblical text? Why or why not?

Without having completed this action research project, the prediction of individual's responses to these questions would result in speculation. It is impossible to project how unique individuals would have responded to the primary and ancillary questions in the focus group. Despite the fact that this portion of data collection is a tremendous challenge to estimate, there is little doubt that it would have yielded immense value and clarity for this project. Primarily, the qualitative discussion would have provided this researcher with the opportunity to learn and grow from other's nuanced experiences.

First and foremost, the introductory focus group questions would have asked participants about their experience with the SADBS. Participants would have specifically been asked if they thought the SADBS helped them move biblical information to life transformation. This researcher would have left this question slightly vague to promote individuality and uniqueness of perspective. Second, through the focus groups, it would have been important to expose a participant's conception of how scriptural study influences spiritual growth. Finally, the focus

groups would have highlighted individual experiences with the content, method, and style of the SADBS themselves. Because the SADBS were created by this researcher for the purpose of this project, there exists a tremendous space for content and methodology improvements. Many of these presumptive improvements will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Even without having the transcript focus group conversations, there are a few presumptive trends that would have been experienced upon the completion of this action research project.

One of the primary trends that would have been visible through the focus groups would have been the correlation between participation and growth. The more an individual would have completed the SADBS, familiarized themselves with the style, and integrated into the LPC community, the more likely they would have been experience spiritual growth.<sup>69</sup> This researcher would have expected the focus group discussion of spiritual growth and transformation to expand far beyond the discussion of daily Bible reading. Focus group participants would have potentially expanded the scope of spiritual growth into other areas of biblical transformation. For example, focus group participants could have presumably highlighted service initiatives, small group community, individual worship through song, missions' opportunities, and so many other aspects of Christian life as they integrate together into spiritual growth. Focus group participants would have presumably concluded that SADBS were effective as a tool in their ability to grow spiritually.

This researcher would have expected focus group participants to have positive view of the SADBS and their ability to increase biblical knowledge. Because the SADBS were anchored

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<sup>69</sup> Willard, Dallas, Alan Andrews, Richard Averbeck, Bruce Demarest, Paula Fuller, Michael Glerup, Bill Hull, Keith Matthews, Bruce McNicol, and Keith Meyer. *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2016; 2010.

in the biblical text that was going to be preached in the upcoming week, focus group participants would have experienced knowledge of Scripture due to an increased involvement with and ownership over their individual learning. Within this presumptive trend in discussion, this researcher would have expected focus group participants to encourage the application portions of SADBS that would have been integrated within LifeGroup Discussion.<sup>70</sup> SADBS were designed to lead individual study into communal worship and discussion. As such, this researcher would have anticipated that participants to speak highly of the SADBS once they were particularly reapplied or reiterated within a communal gathering. On the other hand, there could have been a plausible critic regarding the academic nature of the SADBS. The SADBS were designed to mirror a church culture predicated on the expository preaching of Scripture. The content was designed to provide clarity, insight, and application from the biblical text to everyday life. This researcher would have anticipated a critique of the SADBS as too academic in style and too uniform in structure. Although these assessments will be discussed further in the concluding portions of this thesis, it should be noted that this researcher did not expect solely positive trends from the focus group discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Although the interruption of a global pandemic was problematic for everyday life and detrimental for the concrete implementation of this study, the presumptive results presented within this chapter are anchored in the precedent literature and logically coherent. Namely, it is plausible that an individual with increased levels of participation would experience a greater increase in growth than other participants. Additionally, it was argued that those who readily

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<sup>70</sup> See Appendix C for sample SADBS with LifeGroup questions.

participated in LifeGroup communities would have been more likely to grow according to Bloom's despite a potential deficiency in SADBS participation. Utilizing a Likert scale and a series of self-assessment survey materials, this research would have provided a sufficient framework to demonstrate the validity of SADBS as a means for spiritual growth when attached to the preached word in small group discussion. Focus group discussion would have helped to clarify the nuance in individual's experience with SADBS, LifeGroup, expository preaching, and, most significantly, their individualized perceived spiritual growth. The creation and implementation of SADBS were designed to help the churches move the power of the text from information to transformation.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this project was to study the effect that daily biblical study, which is aligned with the preached text, had on an individual's level of spiritual growth. As a result of the disruptive nature of COVID-19, the intervention design was not able to be implemented as projected and was transferred into the realm of theoretical conclusions. Using precedent literature alongside theoretical and theological underpinnings, presumptive results were stated and supported in the previous chapter. These findings coordinate with the primary aim of this study and are therefore able to be extrapolated into logical conclusions. In order to maintain organization, the conclusions from this study will be divided into two large categories: methodological and theological. Methodological conclusions refer to the procedural findings that have been developed through this study. Theological conclusions refer to the spiritual findings that impact the individual, influence the community, and resonate from the biblical text. The methodological conclusions of this project will be the first area of discussion.

#### **Methodological Conclusions**

There are several methodological conclusions that have been reached as a result of this project. These procedural findings can be classified into two significance categories. First, there are methodological conclusions about the implementation and operational execution of SADBS. Second, there are methodological conclusions about Bloom's Taxonomy and spiritual growth. Both focuses of methodological conclusion will be given equal space for observation and analysis. One of the primary benefits of this project was the conceptualization and development of SADBS material for LPC.

## Methodological Conclusions: SADBS

A widely acknowledged gap exists between the biblical text that is preached and the application of that expositional truth as it is applied in everyday life. Sermon Aligned Daily Bible Studies are fundamentally a resource to address this pertinent issue within the contemporary church. The deficiency of daily scriptural study and biblical application has long required an answer. The thrust of this thesis not only argues this deficiency but has provided a resource intended to address the time that exists between one weekend sermon and the next. It is precisely into this gap that SADBS were developed and implemented for LPC. The value of SADBS can be described in a few fundamental ways.

First, SADBS help to address a lack of cohesiveness which often appears within ministerial contexts. Through the careful and intentional creation of cohesive material, this research project demonstrates the value of consistent, interconnected content for the church's scriptural study. An increase in the cohesiveness of SADBS increases the opportunity for an individual to see the connectivity of Scripture within itself and in daily life. Second, SADBS help to illustrate the need for communal consistency in daily discipleship and Bible reading. The aim of this project was not to create absolute uniformity, but to provide resolute unity around the study of the biblical text. The consistency of SADBS and their integration within the LifeGroups create frequent opportunities for individuals to come into conversation with one another and the biblical text. Theoretically, if the SADBS had been cohesive and connected without being communal and coherent, they would lack the consistency necessary to promote the habitual and transformative practice of scriptural study.

Finally, the SADBS establish the legitimacy of providing churchgoers with daily resources to enrich their spiritual life. At their core, SADBS are a resource that is provided in response to a frequently acknowledged problem. At a fundamental, practical level, SADBS epitomize the call for church leadership to think about discipleship and spiritual formation throughout the week. It is not enough to encourage people toward daily scriptural study, the call of effective ministry is to ask how church leadership can help equip their people to grow. This project highlights need for careful attention to not only pulpit information, but also daily transformation. These findings related to SADBS are profound, but they are further supported when they are supplemented with the conclusions related to Bloom's Taxonomy and spiritual growth.

#### Methodological Conclusions: Bloom's Taxonomy and Spiritual Assessment

Earlier portions of this work ventured to investigate the SADBS and their influence on spiritual growth. In addition, this thesis worked to address and establish the validity of measuring a dimension of spiritual growth using Bloom's Taxonomy. The nuance of this discussion was discussed in Chapter 2, but the implications of this methodological conclusion are important to describe in further detail. Namely, this project demonstrates the legitimacy of evaluating spiritual growth. As discussed previously, growth, progression, and experience are not purely quantitative. However, the church should not irrationally assume that spiritual formation is purely qualitative either. This project demonstrates the validity of seeking to evaluate growth in at least one dimension of spiritual growth. Spiritual formation cannot be comprehensively measured. In his writing on the discerning spiritual growth, Timothy Paul Jones established the

validity of utilizing multiple scales in order to measure an individual's spiritual maturity.<sup>71</sup> This thesis certainly does not claim to quantitatively and comprehensively measure spiritual growth. Despite this evaluative complexity, church leaders should seek to observe, measure, and analyze growth. Specifically, there is a need for the Christian church to incorporate assessment methodologies as a useful tool in their respective discipleship methodologies.

When considering this project, the value of educational approaches to assessment and evaluation is in clear view. This research does not conclude that Bloom's Taxonomy is the only beneficial educational assessment tool. This thesis does not even aim to conclude that Bloom's Taxonomy purely measures holistic spiritual formation and growth. It is the conclusion of this research, however, that Bloom's Taxonomy is a workable methodology that can be employed to measure whether an individual is in regression, stagnation, or cognitive progression. As stated in the literature review portions of this thesis, Bloom's Taxonomy was chosen because of its progression from rote memory to application and beyond. As an educational assessment tool, it is designed to promote the internalization of facts, the application of knowledge, and the implementation of truth in new ways. Cognitive information matters for spiritual transformation. Scripture affirms that biblical truth ought to captivate one's mind and embody one's life.<sup>72</sup>

The precedent literature arises in consistent support of Bloom's Taxonomy and its ability to stratify cognition.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, this thesis builds on the work of those who had previously

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<sup>71</sup> Jones, Timothy Paul. "An Analysis of the Relationship between Fowlerian Stage -Development and Self -Assessed Maturity in Christian Faithfulness among Evangelical Christians." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>73</sup> Hemmings, Maureen. "Using Bloom's Taxonomy in Primary Religious Education." *Religious Education Journal of Australia* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 42-43.

implemented this methodology within the realms of hermeneutics and spiritual formation.<sup>74</sup> One may falsely conclude that Bloom's Taxonomy would have overwhelmed the participant and complicated the growth process. In response to this, questions that were ascribed to varying levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were subtly, but purposefully incorporated into both the survey materials and the focus group discussions. Simply put, the SADBS and data collection methods challenge the individual to evaluate themselves within pre-established and verifiable levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. This regimented and user-friendly self-reflection creates consistent opportunities for participants to evaluate their progress. Using the Likert scale and self-assessments, the survey materials were designed to recognize and celebrate incremental growth. The significance of using assessments for spiritual growth was not just to acknowledge the cumulative growth at the end of the study, but also to observe the growth that took place throughout the SADBS. It is not the assertion of this project that spiritual growth ought to involve a standardization of development. Rather, this project asserts that Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful tool in measuring an individual's growth and Christian maturity. The mixture of qualitative and quantitative analyses of growth are useful in their ability to monitor growth and not create an overarchingly standardization of spiritual maturity. In summation, the precedent literature and methodological conclusions unite to affirm the hypothesis of this project. Namely, consistent participation in SADBS will increase a participant's level of spiritual growth as it can be viewed on Bloom's Taxonomy. This project resulted not only in methodological conclusions, but also theological affirmations.

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<sup>74</sup> Bart B. Bruehler, "Traversing Bloom's Taxonomy in an Introductory Scripture Course." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 21 (2): 92–109. doi:10.1111/teth.12428 (2018), 92.

## **Theological Affirmations**

There are several theological affirmations that can be concluded through this project and its findings. The methodological conclusions are aimed toward summarizing truths related to procedure and operation. Theological affirmations are designed to highlight learned realities as they clarify doctrine and practice. These assertions have direct implications for how one understands God and the implications for ministerial service. In order to clearly identify these assertions in an orderly way, theological affirmations have been divided into ecclesiological, personal, and biblical conclusions. They will be further detailed in this order.

### **Ecclesiological Affirmations**

Perhaps one of the greatest assets of this project was the intentional inclusion of LifeGroups within the design for employing the SADBS. The integration of small group accountability into the daily practice of Scripture reading establishes spiritual disciplines that are repeatable and sustainable. The SADBS are designed to incorporate the biblical text which is preached in weekend service within an individual's practice of scriptural study and their small group community alike. For the church, this widespread alignment affirms the need for communal togetherness and comradery around Scripture. Fundamentally, communal accountability in the biblical text increases a person's involvement with and application of Scripture to everyday life.<sup>75</sup> If this research would have been implemented, it would have demonstrated the strong correlation between relationally accountable LifeGroup communities

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<sup>75</sup> Robert K. Perkins, *Bringing Home the Message: How Community can Multiply the Power of the Preached Word*. Vol. 068-0771. (2010), 83.

and the likelihood that a person remained engaged with the SADBS.<sup>76</sup> From one week to the next and from one day to another, the truth of the biblical text was designed to be consistently contemplated and readily applied. The personal practice of daily biblical study is best applied when it is tactfully incorporated into the ecclesiological identity of a community. This truth is further demonstrated from the intersection between LPC's mission and the aim of this project.

As it was stated in the introductory portions of this thesis, the mission of LPC is to point others to life in Christ. Specifically, this mission is accomplished as the people of LPC know, grow, and show the love of Jesus Christ. This is the fundamental mission and identity of LPC, and it is essential for the integration and success of SADBS. Simply stated, the purpose of the SADBS is at home within the mission and vision of LPC. The implementation of this project and its presumptive results make sense because the expositional study of Scripture is not a deed to be done, but an identity to be embraced. The uniqueness and simultaneous universality of ecclesiological identity is foundational to the successful integration of SADBS. A church's mission and vision for their community is an essential precursor that influences the success of SADBS. This is the sort of identity, mission, and passion that captivated the church<sup>77</sup> in the first-century Greco-Roman world can be readily integrated into contemporary ministries around the world.

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<sup>76</sup> Howard observes this interconnectivity of communal accountability with individualized learning. *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape our Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: (Baker Academic, 2017), 151.

<sup>77</sup> The communal propensity toward accountability, shared resources, and most notably, the devotion of Scripture is made visible in Acts 2:42-47. This example from the first-century church was detailed previously in the theological framework for this study.

## Personal Affirmations

With the communal, ecclesiological conclusions in mind, it is furthermore possible to detail the findings of this project as they concern the individual. One of the primary theoretical conclusions pertained to the importance of cohesive and consistent content made available to participants in the form of SADBS. The academic rigor of each SADBS and the seventeen-week study period created quite an immense challenge for participants. The constancy, reliability, and depth of the SADBS epitomizes the beauty and difficulty that often accompanies a unique dedication to spiritual growth. This project highlights the significance of perseverance for spiritual growth. The persistence and dedication necessary to consistently complete the SADBS is no small feat. Although the transformative work of God is evidenced in the reception of grace through Jesus's atoning sacrifice in a person's life, this project underscores the significance of hard work that often accompanies the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Sermon Aligned Daily Bible Studies afford the individual the opportunity to partner with the refining work of God within their own lives. This project also presents the value of growth for the individual.

One may falsely assume that everyone celebrates growth. If ministries are not careful, they may inappropriately assume that growth is innately appreciated. The reality that this project exposes is that growth is seldom recognized and even less often celebrated. The intervention design of this project was implemented to recognize, value, and commend incremental growth. It can be easy to celebrate new beginnings and altogether subconscious to acknowledge the value of an ending. The SADBS, surveys, and focus groups are designed to recognize and appreciate the growth and perseverance that is manifested in the undervalued space between beginning and end. This is growth. An individual who completed the SADBS and recorded their efforts



throughout the study, would have been provided with the opportunity to recognize the value in daily growth. Because they were asked to self-report in the surveys and consider how LifeGroups influenced their experience, participants were challenged to view their spiritual growth as personal and not private. This distinction between appropriately individualized spiritual growth and incorrectly privatized spiritual growth is a profound theological conclusion which was apparent in the precedent literature<sup>78</sup>, visible in this project, and evidenced within the biblical text.

### Biblical Affirmations

In light of the evidence presented in the biblical text itself, there are a few affirmations that were visible in the study and present within the Scriptures. SADBS are designed to come alongside churches in their development of biblically saturated disciples. As it was developed in the theological framework for this project, the biblical paradigm for discipleship includes a transference of information to transformation. An integral part of being transformed into the will and likeness of Christ is being renewed in one's mind.<sup>79</sup> The biblical texts and this study unite to affirm the paramount necessity of daily dedication for spiritual growth. Psalm 1:1-3 presents a brilliant picture of stability and sustainability for the one who delights in Scripture and consciously decides to meditate on it day and night. Biblical training and teaching are essential for spiritual growth beyond the weekend experience. Ultimately, the consistency and contemplative nature of this integration will move individuals from simply remembering

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<sup>78</sup> Perkins and White observe the distinction between faith as a deeply personal, but not privatized movement of the Christ-follower. Robert K. Perkins, *Bringing Home the Message: How Community can Multiply the Power of the Preached Word*. Vol. 068-0771. (2010), 83. Steve White, "Content and Community: Lifelong Learners in the Context of Small Group Bible Studies." *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2002), 61.

<sup>79</sup> Romans 12:2

scriptural details to embodying biblical theology. Eventually, this project scratches the proverbial surface on a cycle of discipleship in which individuals who are involved in daily aligned, communally accountable, expositionally rich exploration of the biblical text will encourage others to do likewise.

Mirroring the progression in the biblical text, Bloom's Taxonomy stratifies individuals based upon whether or not they are able to transition the retention of information into the purposeful analysis and personal application of that truth. This research forces contemporary ministries to ask, "Does an individual understand biblical truths if they remain unapplied?" Is there a difference between recognizing truth and grasping that truth through application? James 1:22-25 reads,

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

This text is a pertinent reminder that Scripture is designed to be understood through a lifestyle of application. This research shows the legitimacy and validity of evaluating growth and an individual's progression from information to transformation.

One of the most profound conclusions developed through this study stems from the reality that people who spiritually grow do not simply retain orthodoxy but constantly embrace biblically literate orthopraxy. Eventually, this pattern of Scriptural saturation in the individual becomes contagious in the community. As a participant increases in their understanding and

application of Scripture, they will help others do the same. One of the truly captivating conclusions from this project occurs when SADBS participants begin writing their own studies, teach others, and encourage one another into deeper spiritual growth. Just as Bloom's Taxonomy progresses from rote memory to the development of new connections, participants could begin to see new connections in Scripture and reproduce new SADBS. Even though this project yielded valuable conclusions that are both methodological and theological, it is important to consider areas in which the progress of this study could be developed in further research.

### **Areas for Future Study**

Areas for future study are not necessarily critiques of this project, but opportunities for future projects to test the validity of this research's methodology and conclusions. Although this current project is logically coherent, future research would undoubtedly develop new and essential data. There are three primary and overarching focus for future research that will be discussed in the concluding portions of this chapter. Each of the three areas for future study are multifaceted. The first focus for future research is centered upon the expansion of the population size for data collection. The second focus for future research pertains to alternatives to self-assessments as modes for data collection and growth analysis. The final focus for future study is the development of a process for sustainably creating SADBS and methods for evaluation.

#### **Expansion of the Population Size**

One of the preexistent limitations for this project that was stated earlier in this project pertained to the rather limited population size that was going to be utilized in this study. The issue was not that LPC had a sample size that was far too small, but that the population range

was rather limited. LPC does represent a variety of and diversity of people and backgrounds, but an expansion of this study's population size would help to confirm the conclusions of this study. For example, this study's SADBS and methods for evaluation could be shared with several different churches. After outlining the details of the project, it would be possible to administer the resources to other churches and subsequently test their results against the findings of this study. Additionally, it would be important for future research to take place employing SADBS in different areas of the state, country, and even globally. However unlikely, it is possible that the SADBS would have yielded tremendous growth in Texas and produce far less growth in various cultural, denominational, regional sample sizes. The expansion of the population size to include other congregations would produce a tested and corroborated hypothesis for spiritual growth.

In order to test the influence of SADBS on spiritual growth with clarity and confidence, an inclusion of different congregations from various regions of the United States of America would benefit. The corroboration SADBS does not merely need more participants, but different types of individuals to study the effects of this study's implementation within Christian community. It would be a challenge to have various churches agree to implement and utilize the SADBS in conjunction with the text that is preached and the small group communities, but this sort of data set expansion and diversity would undoubtedly clarify the presumptive findings of this study.

### Alternatives to Self-Assessment

The difficulty and simultaneous necessity of self-assessment in a study of spiritual growth is a necessary complexity. Without totally eliminating the aspect of self-assessment in the process of data collection, future studies could develop alternatives to this introspective analysis.

There are a few primary alternatives that could be developed. First, the survey materials could include a brief collection of objective questions that would gauge an individual's level of biblical knowledge. These impartial questions could be paired with the self-assessment questions in order to emphasize potentially false disclosures.<sup>80</sup> To this objective line of survey questions, future research could also add essay responses regarding the biblical text. An individual's response to these essay prompts could be utilized to gauge a participant's level according to Bloom's Taxonomy.

The second alternative for utilizing only self-assessment reflections involves the intentional inclusion of a peer evaluation. This alternative would allow a participant to be evaluated by a peer who is also involved in the study. Under the peer evaluation system, a participant's spiritual growth and development would be analyzed by another. One of the challenges for data sets that only include self-assessment is the truthfulness and authenticity each individual answer. The inclusion of other individuals alongside objective questions and essay prompts would not eliminate bias in future research, but it would enable a more well-rounded presentation of spiritual growth in the individual.

One effective method that has been used to integrate others in the assessment of growth is called the, "360-Degree Appraisal." In the corporate setting, this assessment innovation is designed to rate an employee's performance based upon reviews from superior positions, subordinates, and co-workers alike.<sup>81</sup> As a result, the appraisal is provided from several different perspectives in order to provide a well-rounded view of an individual's work. This form of

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<sup>80</sup> Bruehler utilized objective questioning when he implemented Bloom's Taxonomy into his hermeneutics class. This integration of impartial questions about the biblical text was demonstrated as a valuable means to measure growth.

<sup>81</sup> Potočník, Kristina and Neil Anderson. "Assessing Innovation: A 360-degree Appraisal Study." *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 20, no. 4 (2012): 497-509.

assessment could be readily implemented within future studies. For example, participants could be invited into deeper, more contemplative accountability as they seek to evaluate their growth and spur each other into deeper transformation.

### **A Sustainable Plan for SADBS**

With both the expansion of the population and the alternatives for self-assessment in mind, it is necessary to think about how to make SADBS into a sustainable model for future discipleship. The development of sustainable SADBS with longevity is quite a challenge and a necessary pursuit for future areas of study. There are a few aspects of SADBS production and implementation that are challenging. First, SADBS are challenging to sustain because of the pure volume of writing that needs to be produced. In the production of seventeen weeks of five SADBS, this researcher worked for more than six months developing content. The amount of writing that needs to be completed in addition to the normative workload of church leadership can be rather immense. Second, it is not just the amount, but the frequency of writing that makes SADBS a challenge. With five weekday studies being produced for every weekend sermon, continuing that pace of content production is quite a responsibility. Future research would be well-served to establish a paradigm for producing SADBS in a sustainable manner. Finally, the mode of written communication can be a challenge to produce. The ability to craft SADBS in written form is a different skillset from the oratory gifting that often accompanies a homiletician. Preaching and writing effectively are not mutually exclusive, but they should not be assumed as indistinguishable parts of the same gifting. SADBS are a valuable resource for effective ministry and a pivotal development of future research will be to create a maintainable model for their production. Some churches may choose to incorporate a specific staff position for curriculum

writing and SADBS development. Other churches may choose to utilize pre-existent Bible studies that mirror the role of SADBS. For either alternative, the desire to increase scripturally saturated growth requires serious consideration for churches desiring to help their congregations move from information to transformation. A full response to issues of sustainability will not be possible until future research is completed. Despite this necessary delay, a few solutions can be posited in the meantime.

At many points during the development of SADBS, this researcher desired to alter the medium for communication to podcast or video content. In order to maintain cohesiveness material, SADBS were exclusively written for the seventeen-week trial period. Despite this choice for communicative uniformity, a variety of mediums should have been used to share the SADBS. For example, future research could create SADBS that are a combination of written, podcast, and video communication every week. This diversity of content would provide the participant with precious variety during the week's collection of SADBS. As such, the first response for future research could be to diversify the methods for communication. A second proposal for future research could focus upon fluctuating the logistical details of the project.

In addition to changing the style of communication, future research could alter the detail-oriented facets of the SADBS. For example, instead of implementing SADBS for five weekdays, future research could implement three studies on the text to be preached in an upcoming weekend sermon. Additionally, future research could create SADBS that only require five minutes to complete rather than ten minutes. Most significantly, future research could choose a trial period that is shorter than a seventeen-week development of SADBS. This lengthy timeframe was originally chosen to comprehensively cover Acts 1-7 and provide an extended trial period to observe growth. Nonetheless, future studies could reasonably abbreviate the trial

period and increase the likelihood of sustainability while maintaining the opportunities for growth. The aforementioned amendments to this project would enable a greater probability for sustainability in the future research. With these areas of future study in mind, several overarching and summarizing conclusions can be formulated

## **Conclusion**

This study was designed to create and observe a process in which individual's spiritual growth could be observed as it relates the daily Scripture reading. It could be asserted, based upon the precedent literature and argumentation evidenced in this thesis, that the implementation of SADBS would have led to an increased Christian maturity and growth. Although presumptive results could be viewed with varying levels of skepticism, this thesis has established solidified grounds upon which a few summarizing conclusions can be established.

These conclusions for spiritual growth must therefore be summarized. First, the SADBS are fundamentally designed to increase a sense of individual ownership in their own spiritual growth through daily Scriptural study. By integrating the SADBS within LifeGroup discussion and the sermons, participants would have been invited into an enhanced level of accountability and communal engagement. The SADBS were designed to personalize daily Bible reading without privatizing the spiritual growth therein. Second, the implementation of this study was designed to emphasize the value of daily consistency for spiritual growth. Aspirational, future-oriented growth is often nullified when there is no tangible implementation of purposeful, daily action. By their very nature, SADBS were established to increase the participant's appreciation for incremental growth. Third, the integration of SADBS with Bloom's Taxonomy coordinated to establish the validity of measuring spiritual growth. Although no singular assessment tool or



methodology can comprehensively measure spiritual growth, the presumptive findings of this study did function to reinforce the validity of measuring incremental progress. Fourth, this study highlighted the significance of continual, ongoing discipleship and spiritual maturity. SADBS are not just beneficial for a prescribed trial period, but for the continued growth and development of the Christian.

The communication of the biblical text was never meant to be relegated to thirty minutes of weekly interaction. Simply stated, the methodology underlying SADBS accentuated the continual pursuit of Christian maturity. Fifth, the cognitive progression of Bloom's Taxonomy, in coordination with the SADBS, would have challenged individuals to view spiritual growth as something which is essentially and necessarily reproducing. For example, as an individual would have progressed in Bloom's Taxonomy and in their study of Scripture, they would have been encouraged to write their own versions of SADBS to be shared with others. In this cycle, there is tremendous potential for Christocentric, scripturally saturated discipleship reproduction. As participant would have progressed through Bloom's Taxonomy, he or she would have naturally been led to create new connections and allow knowledge to influence action. In much the same way, increased spiritual maturity encourages the Christian to transfer theology into everyday life.

The SADBS were not designed for the one-dimensional retention of biblical knowledge, but the transference of information to transformation. This study observed and analyzed the presumptive implementation and effects of SADBS on an individual's level of spiritual growth. Whether through the lens of Scriptural evidence or the precedent literature, it can be reasonably asserted that SADBS hold tremendous value for the continued spiritual growth of the Christian within the community of faith. Although SADBS are certainly not a comprehensive, all-

encompassing tool for spiritual growth and maturity, they are a powerful resource needed in order to help a Christian move biblical information to a lifestyle of God-honoring transformation.

## APPENDIX A

### Self-Assessment Survey Questions Pre-Study Survey

1. What is your age group?
  - a. 18 to 24
  - b. 24 to 29
  - c. 30 to 34
  - d. 35 to 39
  - e. 40 to 44
  - f. 45 to 49
  - g. 50 to 54
  - h. 55 to 59
  - i. 60 to 64
  - j. 65 to 69
  - k. 70 to 74
  - l. 75 to 79
  - m. 80 to 84
  - n. 85 to 89
  - o. 90 to 94
  - p. 95 to 100
2. How often do you read the Bible?
  - a. Everyday
  - b. 4-5 times per week
  - c. 2-3 times per week
  - d. 1 time per week
  - e. Less than 1 time per week
3. How often do you attend LifePoint Church?
  - a. Every Sunday (47 or more Sunday's per year)
  - b. 3 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - c. 2 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - d. 1 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - e. Less than 1 of 4 Sunday's a month
4. Which statement best describes your involvement in LifeGroup?
  - a. My group meets weekly and I am consistently involved.
  - b. My group meets weekly and I am somewhat involved.
  - c. My group meets occasionally, and I am involved.
  - d. My group meets occasionally, and I am seldom involved.
  - e. I am not currently in a LifeGroup
5. Complete the following sentence with your top two answers. I learn best when I...
  - a. Read what is being taught

- b. Observe what is being demonstrated
  - c. Take notes on what is being taught
  - d. Participate in what is being taught
  - e. Teach another person
  - f. Am part of a group of learners
6. How familiar are you with the Biblical Book “Acts?”
- a. Not at all familiar
  - b. Slightly familiar
  - c. Moderately familiar
  - d. Very familiar
  - e. Extremely familiar
7. I am able to remember the content from a weekend sermon during the week.
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always
8. I apply the truth of a weekend sermon throughout the week.
- a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
9. I am satisfied with my current habits for studying the Bible.
- a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
10. I am satisfied with my current ability to read and understand the Biblical text.
- a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
11. I make connections between one section of Biblical text to other sections of Biblical text.
- a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Agree

- e. Strongly Agree
12. When I listen to a weekend sermon, I have previously studied the Biblical passage that is preached.
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always
13. I would like to be provided with more information to help me understand the passage that is preached in a weekend sermon.
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Always
14. I think that regular attendees of a church that are 18 years of age or older should be provided with Bible study materials that are connected to the weekend sermon.
- a. Strongly disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree

**Self-Assessment Survey Questions**  
During-Study Surveys

1. What is your age group?
  - a. 18 to 24
  - b. 24 to 29
  - c. 30 to 34
  - d. 35 to 39
  - e. 40 to 44
  - f. 45 to 49
  - g. 50 to 54
  - h. 55 to 59
  - i. 60 to 64
  - j. 65 to 69
  - k. 70 to 74
  - l. 75 to 79
  - m. 80 to 84
  - n. 85 to 89
  - o. 90 to 94
  - p. 95 to 100
  
2. What is the average number of days that you completed the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Study in a given week?
  - a. 0 of 5 Days
  - b. 1 of 5 Days
  - c. 2 of 5 Days
  - d. 3 of 5 Days
  - e. 4 of 5 Days
  - f. 5 of 5 Days
  
3. How often do you attend LifePoint Church?
  - a. Every Sunday (47 or more Sunday's per year)
  - b. 3 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - c. 2 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - d. 1 of 4 Sunday's a month
  - e. Less than 1 of 4 Sunday's a month
  
4. Which statement best describes your involvement in LifeGroup?
  - a. My group meets weekly and I am consistently involved.
  - b. My group meets weekly and I am somewhat involved.
  - c. My group meets occasionally, and I am involved.
  - d. My group meets occasionally, and I am seldom involved.
  - e. I am not currently in a LifeGroup
  
5. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies are helping me to grow spiritually.
  - a. Strongly Disagree

- b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
6. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better remember the sermon.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
7. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to remember the content of the Biblical passages that we have studies.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
8. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to put the truth of the Biblical passages in my own words.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
9. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better explain the Biblical content to others.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
10. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, my confidence to discuss biblical truth with others has improved.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree

11. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better apply the truth from the Biblical passage.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
12. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better dissect the Biblical passages we are studying in Acts.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
13. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better connect other passages of the Bible to what we are studying in Acts.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
14. After reading the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better evaluate the content of scripture.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
15. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies are challenging to comprehend.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
16. The content of the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies is challenging to apply.
  - a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree



**Self-Assessment Survey Questions**  
Post-Study Survey

17. What is your age group?
- a. 18 to 24
  - b. 24 to 29
  - c. 30 to 34
  - d. 35 to 39
  - e. 40 to 44
  - f. 45 to 49
  - g. 50 to 54
  - h. 55 to 59
  - i. 60 to 64
  - j. 65 to 69
  - k. 70 to 74
  - l. 75 to 79
  - m. 80 to 84
  - n. 85 to 89
  - o. 90 to 94
  - p. 95 to 100
18. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies were easy to understand.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
19. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies helped me to grow spiritually.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
20. My involvement in a LifeGroup helped improve my ability to complete the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
  - f. Not Applicable
21. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies improved my ability to remember the weekend sermon.

- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
22. The Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies improved my ability to remember the content of the Biblical text.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
23. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, my ability to discuss the Biblical content with others has improved.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
24. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am better able to put the truth of the Biblical passages in my own words.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
25. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, my ability to explain Biblical content with others has improved.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
26. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better apply the truth from the Biblical passage into everyday life.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree

27. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, my ability to dissect the Biblical passages we studied in Acts has improved.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
28. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better connect other passages of the Bible to what we studied in Acts.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
29. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I am able to better evaluate the content of scripture.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
30. After completing the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies, I have an increased sense of ownership over my spiritual growth.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree
31. After completing the study of Acts 1-7, I will continue to read the Bible for the same amount of time each weekday.
- a. Strongly Disagree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Neither Agree nor Disagree
  - d. Agree
  - e. Strongly Agree

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Focus Group Questions**

#### *Post-Study Assessment*

Thank you for being willing to participate in today's focus group. I want to remind you that your involvement in this discussion is completely voluntary. If for any reason, at any time, you wish to no longer participate in this focus group, you are free to leave without repercussion or consequence. We are here today to talk about the implementation and effects of Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies in LifePoint Church. I have a list of questions prepared, but all questions may not be asked because of time constraints and the flow of conversation. The focus group today will be recorded and transcribed as a part of this researcher's doctoral thesis in coordination with Liberty University. Confidentiality will be maintained for today's focus group in the completion and eventual publication of this dissertation. Due to time constraints and the free flow of responses, not all questions will necessarily be asked.

## Focus Group Questions

### Primary Questions:

1. Do you feel that the daily studies helped participants turn information into spiritual transformation? Why or why not?
2. In your opinion, did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies increase your ability to understand and apply scripture? Why or why not.
3. How would you describe your experience with the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies?
4. How would you describe the connection between spiritual growth and scriptural study?
5. What would you suggest as improvements for future sermon-aligned studies?

### Ancillary Questions:

1. What are some of the benefits experienced through the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies?
2. Did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies influence your spiritual growth? Why or why not?
3. How did the Sermon-Aligned Daily Bible Studies influence your ability to apply biblical truth in everyday life?
4. Do you think there is substantial difference in the benefit associated with the church sharing collective biblical learning when compared to an individualistic approach to biblical study? Why or why not?
6. As a result of the study, were you able to make connections to other portions of the biblical text? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX C

### Week 1: Acts 1:1-3

#### Day 1: An Introduction to Acts

Read: Acts 1:1-4

A deep and powerful question looms in the background of the biblical book of Acts. How will the new age of God's promised salvation, initiated and fulfilled in Jesus, continue to unfold on earth after his absence? How will the earliest followers of Christ continue to live out His example even after He had left them? To understand these questions like these, the book of Acts must be understood within its early context.

In the period of history called the first-century Greco-Roman world, a religion was only thought of as valid if it had a strong history. New religions were met with suspicion and the Biblical authors often connected the early church with God's work in the Old Testament. Throughout Acts, Luke (the most-likely author) is demonstrating the validity, power, and vibrancy of those who would follow in the example of Christ, empowered by His Spirit. Carefully and in detail, Luke writes the book of Acts to demonstrate how the early church was an unstoppable continuation of God's promise from long before.

The book of Acts traces the powerful spread of the Good News of Jesus as it shatters through ethnic and socioeconomic barriers alike. Much of Acts will feature works of the early apostles. Do not miss, however, that *the* unifying character in all of the early church is no a man or woman, but the resurrected Christ and the unrivaled power of His Holy Spirit. Acts is a truly unique book that gives us a window to see the development of the early church and how the Holy Spirit is continuing the mission of Jesus to a world in need. It is a story of redemption. It is a story of power. It is a history to which we also belong.

As we study Acts together, as a community, our prayer is that Lord will stir your affections for Him, increase your dependence upon Him, and ignite your life in Him. We are taking a journey together.

Big Idea: Acts follows the stories of disciples and apostles, but the main character in the explosion of early church was God.

Question: The legitimacy of an ancient religion was based upon its history and ability to withstand the test of time. Why is it significant to view Acts as a continuation of God's promise?

Activity: In your own life, how have you seen the Holy Spirit work through you to continue the mission of Jesus? Write down a few ideas to share with your LifeGroup next week.

## Day 2: The Readers of Acts

Read: Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-4

Whether you are reading Acts for the first time or the hundredth time, the question has probably crossed your mind: Who is Theophilus? Throughout Christian history, much thought has been given to who Luke was writing to in his introduction of Acts. Since the third century, many theologians believed Theophilus to be a general name given to those who love God.<sup>82</sup> In their defense, Theophilus is a combination of two Greek words, *theo* (God) and *philos* (love). With this in mind, some early theologians believed Theophilus was a name given not to an individual specifically, but to a type of Christ-follower

It is most likely that Theophilus was a wealthy, powerful man who was either a believer or on the cusp of believing in Jesus.<sup>83</sup> The name Theophilus was used in Christian and non-Christian circles within the first three centuries of the church to describe a person of specific honor and authority within society. There are two things that are important to know about the book of Acts and who it was written to.

1. Acts is not the first time that Luke has written to Theophilus. Acts is the second part of the story of what Jesus “*began to do and teach*” now by the power of his Holy Spirit. It was important for Theophilus to know what Jesus had done *for* humanity and now what Jesus wanted to do *through* humanity. God’s work through Christ in the Gospel of Luke is crucial when Luke wrote to Theophilus in Acts.
2. Even though Acts is written to an individual, it is for the community. Several New Testament letters are addressed to individuals and, at the same time, intended for the church community.<sup>84</sup> What Luke wrote to Theophilus was precisely for him, but profoundly directed toward the early church. In the same way, what God is doing in your life is intended for you, but often extends past you.

**Big Idea:** The Gospel of Luke and Acts are focused on what Jesus has done for humanity and now what He wants to do through humanity.

**Question:** As you read Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-4, what do you notice? What are the similarities and differences?

**Question:** Why is it significant that Luke is detailed and focused when writing to Theophilus in both Luke and Acts? Why was it important for Luke to discuss what God did for humanity and that which he wants to do through humanity?

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<sup>82</sup> Abingdon Press. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Volume 5*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006. 569.

<sup>83</sup> See Luke 1:3-4.

<sup>84</sup> See Philemon, Timothy, and Titus.

### Day 3: Importance of Divine Revelation in Christ

Read: I Corinthians 15:1-11 and Acts 1:1-4

Scripture tells of a God who is above and beyond human comprehension and yet He has always desired to know us and make himself known to us. This is fully accomplished in Jesus, who is God revealed. The beginning of Acts emphasizes how Jesus had intentionally showed Himself for forty days after His resurrection. The beginning of Acts tells us that even after his death and resurrection Jesus continued to show himself for forty days. In I Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul explains how important these post-resurrection appearances are.

When Jesus shows himself after the resurrection, it is extremely important. Over a period of forty days and to more than five hundred people at one time, Christ makes himself visible.<sup>85</sup> The Christian God is one who does not merely send a message but also sends himself. In the book of Acts, apostles were people who encountered Christ and were sent out on mission in their communities and around the world. Interestingly, Acts has also been given the title, “The Acts of the Apostles.”

The idea of an apostle in the original Greek describes a person who is sent out as an ambassador<sup>86</sup> of a message or for a person.<sup>87</sup> These early followers of Christ went in confidence and in boldness because they had encountered a revealed and resurrected Christ. Just as God is in the business of making himself known, He is also in the business of sending His people to world in need. We, the church, are a people being sent!

**Big Idea:** We, as LifePoint Church have the blessing of experiencing the goodness of God revealed in His community, through His Word, and by His Holy Spirit. We also have the blessing of being sent to proclaim the resurrected Christ.

**Questions:** Why is it significant that God did not only send a message, but himself. How could this truth impact the way that you seek to share faith with friends, neighbors, and families?

**Bonus Activity:** Look up the following: *transcendence* and *immanence*. They are theological terms that have been used describe God’s relationship in the universe and with humanity.

Where in Acts 1:1-4 can you see both theological concepts? Is it easier for you to think of God as one who is transcendent or one who is immanent? If God is *both* transcendent and immanent in his relationship with us, what does that teach us about His character?

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<sup>85</sup> See I Corinthians 15:5-6.

<sup>86</sup> One of the first occurrences of this Greek terminology in written history pertains to the dispatching of a fleet or expedition.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



## Day 4: Reasonable Faith

Read: John 20:19-31

How can the Christian maintain belief in an age of doubt? Thankfully, there is nothing new about this question. In fact, it is precisely into a situation of uncertainty (see John 20:19-31) that Jesus chose to appear to the disciples and give them many “convincing proofs that He was alive.”<sup>88</sup> If the resurrected Christ is interested in proof, should not His church be interested in the evidence that supports our faith.

*Tekmerion* is the Greek word that Luke specifically chose to describe the “proof” that Jesus gave for his resurrection. *Tekmerion* is evidence, which is decisive, clear and convincing. It is only used here in the New Testament.<sup>89</sup> *Jesus is not afraid of proof, He is the creator of it.* Christ came, lived, died, resurrected, ascended, and is coming again that we could have confidence in Him. There are several convincing evidences for Jesus’ Resurrection.

### 4 Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

1. The burial site for Jesus was specific
  - a. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all mention Joseph of Arimathea as the owner of the tomb in which Jesus was buried. Joseph was a prominent man in Israel and a fake resurrection could have been easily disproved.
2. Women were the first to find the empty tomb
  - a. In the first-century, women were not deemed as reliable witnesses in court. If one were inventing the story of Jesus’ resurrection, they would not have fabricated women as the first witnesses.
3. Friends and Enemies of Jesus both recognized the tomb was empty
  - a. Matthew 28 tells of the Jewish authorities and their attempt to bribe Roman soldiers in order for them to say that the disciples stole the body. The contents of the tomb could have been easily verified.
4. Jesus reappeared after his resurrection to a variety of people in different quantities
  - a. Jesus appeared to over 500 people after his death. Many of the people who were visited were alive when the New Testament accounts were written and were willing to die rather than renounce Christ.

For more information, please see William Lane Craig’s Discussion on “The Resurrection of Jesus” or Gary Habermas’s book entitled, “The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus.”

**Big Idea:** Christians can stand in confidence in light of the overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ did resurrect from the dead.

**Question:** In your faith, what have been some areas of doubt, uncertainty, and skepticism about God? Take a moment to write down what these might be and bring them to your LifeGroup for further discussion.

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<sup>88</sup> See Acts 1:3 (NIV).

<sup>89</sup> Danker, Frederick W. and Kathryn Krug. *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, 994.

## **Day 5: Surprised by Easter**

Read: Luke 24:1-35

Luke 24:13-35 tells us a story about two men who were saddened and hopeless because of Jesus' suffering and death. Walking away with Jerusalem, they talked with each other about what happened. Without recognizing, Jesus, in resurrected form, walked with these men. Jesus traveled with them for quite a long while, and they did not realize that it is Christ himself who is walking and talking with them. They were ignorant to the incarnate Lord and oblivious to the resurrection.

We could say, "They were surprised by Easter." In fact, it is not until Jesus sits with them to pray and eat that they recognize the risen Lord. There is something profound and special about the moment that Jesus sits and eats with them. In fact, it is not until the profound moment when Jesus sits with them to pray and eat that they recognize the risen Lord.

On days three and four of this first week of bible study, we have taken a brief look at the significance of and evidence for the God who delights in revealing himself to humanity. Thankfully, stories like Luke 24:13-35 are included in scripture to provide hope for those who don't recognize Jesus the first time. The beauty of Acts is that even after the ascension of Jesus, God is still making himself known on earth. We, as LifePoint Church, have the opportunity to journey together through the book of Acts and watch God's grace and power unfold in the lives of the early church. BUCKLE UP...

Quote: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" – Luke 24:32

Question: The men recognize Jesus only when he sits down with them to share a meal and pray. Why do you think this is significant?

Question: In Luke 24:33-35, why do you think the two travelers responded by going back to Jerusalem from Emmaus? How could this impact your life and faith?

## Week 2: Acts 1:4-11

### Day 1: Kingdoms in Competition

Read: Acts 1:4-11

Acts 1:4-9 takes us into a final conversation between Jesus and his disciples before he is taken into heaven before their own eyes in an event known as “the ascension.” Imagine if you were a disciple, following Jesus, walking with him on ancient roads, and watching the way he lived his life.

Envision what it would have been like for you to watch Jesus be put to death only to return again as a message and embodiment of eternal life. Emboldened by the resurrection of Jesus, the chosen apostles ask Jesus the question in Acts 1:6, “Lord, will you at this time restore the *kingdom to Israel*?” This question is so profound that we could spend a few weeks unpacking its implications. For our discussion today, however, we will note just three significant features.

1. What did the apostles mean when they said, “Kingdom *to Israel*?”
  - a. During the first century, most Jews longed for liberation from Rome and the reestablishment of the power they experienced with King David.<sup>90</sup> Some even attempted to bring about this liberation through armed conflict. After Jesus’ return, many wanted Him to restore Israel to a national and militaristic power.
2. Why is the idea of “A Kingdom” or “Kingdoms” important for Acts?
  - a. Luke uses the phrase “Kingdom of God”<sup>91</sup> in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts more than all other New Testament authors combined. Much of Jesus’ life was spent talking about him bringing the kingdom of God on earth. We have seen this already in our week one study of Acts 1:3. The issue with the early apostles’ question is not about whether or not Jesus came to establish a kingdom. It is about what type of Kingdom Jesus had in mind.
3. What can we learn from the way that Jesus answers their question?
  - a. We can find Jesus’ answer to their question in Acts 1:7-8. They may have been asking about political power, but Jesus had so much in store. Jesus corrected the disciples by redirecting, broadening, and ultimately enhancing the sort of kingdom that they will continue and to which they will belong.<sup>92</sup>

Jesus saw past what they wanted on earth (Kingdom of Israel) into what they needed from heaven (The Kingdom of God). Whenever you see Jesus discussing or describing what the kingdom of God or Heaven is like, pay close attention. We are destined to be citizens of that

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<sup>90</sup> Burge, Gary M. *New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within its Cultural Contexts* Zondervan Publishing House, 2020, 233.

<sup>91</sup> This is based upon the English translations visible in the NIV translation. It should be noted that Matthew uses the phrases Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God often in a seemingly interchangeable way. This does not reduce the fact that the notion of the kingdom belonging to Jesus is of the utmost importance to our author Luke.

<sup>92</sup> Polhill, John B. *acts*. Vol. 26;26:.. Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1992.

kingdom as well. For more on this subject, read “How God Became King” or “Surprised by Hope” by NT Wright.

Big Idea: God may have to get you past your wants (on earth) to satisfy your needs (from heaven).

Question: What are some earthly things we seek, that are intended to be satisfied in Christ? Write down a few ideas to bring to your LifeGroup.

## Day 2: Weak People | Powerful God

Read: Acts 1:4-11

In a latter portion of Jesus' response to the question, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6)," Jesus responds by telling the early church that they will "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."<sup>93</sup> Echoing from the lips of Christ to the disciples who had seen hope resurrected before their very eyes, this idea of receiving power through the Holy Spirit's presence is packed with importance for us today.

Throughout Acts, we will see exactly how this power is manifested in the early church. For today, we will look at "power" through the lens of Luke's Gospel. To understand what our author, Luke, means by power, we need to take a look at how he has used the term before. Below is a list of ways in which the idea of power ("*dynamis*") has been used by Luke before Acts 1:8.

Activity: Read the following texts and take notes on how Luke uses the term: "power." Based on the text below, what does this kind of power look like?

- Luke 4:14-15
- Luke 4:36
- Luke 6:19 and Luke 8:46
- Luke 9:1
- Luke 10:19
- Luke 21:27
- Luke 24:49

Although Acts 1:8 is the first time that "power" is mentioned in the book of Acts, the idea of God working in might and power was nothing new for the early church. As we continue our journey with the early church, be on the lookout for the "power" of God manifested in the Christian community. For more on today's discussion, read "God will clothe your weakness with power" written by Marshall Segal and "Forgotten God" by Francis Chan.

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<sup>93</sup> See Acts 1:8.

### Day 3: Being and Becoming: Mission-Minded

Read: Acts 8:1-8 and Matthew 28:18-20

It is not an accident that the command to be witnesses throughout the world is sandwiched between a reception of power through the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ on earth. We, as modern-day readers are meant to feel every ounce of this passage's weight, intensity, and urgency. For good reason, many believe Acts 1:8 to be the theme verse for the book of Acts. Four places are sequentially listed in which the apostles were called to be witnesses.<sup>94</sup> Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Jesus, in some of his last words to the apostles, chose to emphasize how the Gospel is going to expand throughout the world through witnesses. Across social, ethnic, and geographic barriers, the Gospel of the resurrected Lord cannot be stopped.

Our reading for today in Acts 8:1-8 walked us through an example of Samaritan ministry, but it is important to know just a few things about what "the ends of the earth" means.

- "The ends of the earth" was referenced to by many ancient historians but was often given a subjective variety of distances.<sup>95</sup> The idea is that God is sending people as far as they can think to tell other's about forgiveness which is made possible in Christ.
- *Sending people to "the ends of the earth" for the sake of the Gospel is nothing new for God. Isaiah 49:6 reads, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

**Big Idea:** The promise of God-given power and Christ's return should ignite an intensity and urgency for the Gospel in our souls and communities alike.

**Question:** One of the values at LifePoint Church is to be Mission-Minded. In what ways does your life succeed and/or fail in reflecting the urgency of the Gospel Mission to a world in need? What are some reasons for success or failure in these areas?

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<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that the same Greek word "*martyr*" has been translated into English as both witness and martyr. Pulling its root from a legal or ethical witness, "*martyr*" carries the idea of one who is speaking and embodying the truth of a given testimony.

<sup>95</sup> Burge, 230. Strabo was a first-century geographer who believed the end of the earth to be Spain. Although humorous, this could have influenced the movement of the Gospel toward Spain.

#### Day 4: “Why are you looking into the sky?”

Read: John 16:7-11

Far too often, the “ascension” is an undiscussed element of the Christian faith. The “ascension” refers to the departure of Jesus’ physical presence on earth to God the Father in heaven following his post-resurrection appearances with the disciples. The goal of today’s devotional is not to tackle the ascension as a whole, but rather to take a look at one question that lingers in the wake of Jesus’ physical, earthly departure. If you have taken time to read Acts 1:11, you will have noticed the question that is asked of the Men of Galilee, “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?”<sup>96</sup> It seems humorous at first glance. The simple answer is that these men are staring into the sky because Jesus just floated there. Where else would the two white-robed men expect the Galileans to look? It seems like a silly question, but at its core, there is profound truth for the church throughout time.

1. The angelic rebuke is followed by a promise.
  - a. Notice that the question issued to the Men of Galilee is only half of verse 11. Although Jesus was physically leaving them, the presence and power of God was promised to never depart His followers (John 16:7-11).
2. Mountaintop spiritual experiences are not an end in and of themselves.
  - a. The disciples were supposed to be sure of their ascender without becoming stationary because of the ascension. They could not linger with their heads in the sky because a mission was at hand.
  - b. A church that is fixated on “looking to the sky” without ever “looking to the mission of Christ” is not in alignment with Acts 1:4-11. Mountaintop experiences with God are beautiful. Similar to mountains, however, the greatest spiritual growth sometimes springs from the valleys.

Big Idea: The church is called to live with an awareness of Christ’s return and an eagerness for his mission in the here and now.

Questions: Do you ever think about Jesus’ return? If so, explain how you feel when you do. If not, why? Do you think it is hard to balance an expectation of Christ’s return with our calling to be focused on the “here” and “now” of everyday life? Why or why not?

For a brief discussion in response to the question, read the article entitled, “*Why did Jesus have to leave,*” written by Trevin Wax.

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<sup>96</sup> Acts 1:11 (Many translate the Greek word “*Ouranos*” as heaven instead of sky)

## Day 5: A Day to Pray

Reading: None

Today's devotional is intended to be a change of pace from what we have done thus far in our study of Acts as the LifePoint Church community. Our church-wide focus for this week's devotionals was on being empowered by the Holy Spirit for the Gospel mission. Below you will find some of the people and organizations that our church partners with financially in ministry to our community and around the globe.<sup>97</sup>

Activity: Please take time out of your day to not only become acquainted with these ministries, but also to pray for them.

### Organizations:

- The Timothy Initiative: TTI is an church-planting movement that has seen the development of thousands of Christian Communities around the globe.
- Anchor Point: Anchor Point is a ministry in our own shopping plaza that is dedicated to empowering and equipping families in need. It is a great place to serve and provides a variety of services in and around League City.
- Elijah Rising: ER is an organization dedicated to ending human trafficking through prayer, awareness, restoration, and intervention.
- North American Mission Board: A cooperative ministry of united churches that is focused on compassion ministry, church planting, and evangelism here in the United States. They believe that the local church is God's plan to reach the nations and are dedicated to seeing the church multiply in every way.

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<sup>97</sup> The listed missions' organizations represent only a selection from our strategic partnerships in ministry.



### Week 3: Acts 1:12-26

#### Day 1: Devoted to Prayer

Read: Acts 1:12-14

To read and understand Acts 1:12-14 we need to imagine what it would have been like to not only experience Jesus after his resurrection, but also watch him leave. Could you imagine how puzzling and possibly disheartening it must have been to see your savior ascend to heaven? Jesus had commanded the disciples to not depart Jerusalem until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit<sup>98</sup>, but how long would they have to linger? How long would they have to wait? How long would these followers of Jesus have to pause before they could progress.

Acts 1:12-14 paints a powerful picture of how Christian waiting does not have to be wasted! This eclectic gathering of early believers refused to waste their waiting as they gathered together, in one accord, and devoted themselves to prayer. The Greek idea of devotion which is present in v. 14 is that of steadfastness, consistency, and ultimately readiness. These believers were steadfast, consistent, and ready in their prayers. I wonder if we could describe our own practice of prayer in the same way.

To be devoted to something is to ascribe value and significance to that habit regardless of inconvenience and sacrifice. Imagine what it would be like to consistently commune through with God if you had just physically been with Jesus. The early community of Christ followers did not shrink into passivity because of their waiting. They pulled together and prayed together. They prayed as though their effectiveness and even their existence depended upon the presence of God. We would do well to pray the same way!

Devoted prayer seeks God beyond a situation, sees people beyond their circumstance, and remains dedicated despite discomfort.

Big Idea: If our community is to advance the gospel we must be a community deeply devoted to prayer.

Question: Would you describe yourself as “devoted” to prayer? Why or why not? What could you do to establish patterns and habits of “devoted prayer?”

Question 2: What do you notice about the collection of people who gathered in vv. 12-14? Why might this specific collection be significant for us today? You will have to do a little digging, but it will be worth it!

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<sup>98</sup> See Acts 1:4.

## Day 2: Prayerful Action

Read: Acts 1:15-26, Luke 22:28-30

It could be tempting to study and appreciate Acts 1:12-14 without ever pausing to ponder the verses that follow in vv. 15-26. If we are not careful, our focus can be drawn to one portion of scripture without ever having looked at the more difficult sections that surround it. It can be easy to focus on the sections about being devoted to prayer and intentional gathering and at the very same time blissfully overlook the honest realities of betrayal<sup>99</sup>, spilled guts<sup>100</sup>, and casting lots<sup>101</sup>.

Have you ever wondered why Luke chose to include the story of Judas in the middle of talking about the health of the early church? The scriptures do not hesitate to discuss and process the difficult realities of life and ministry, neither should we. Acts 1:12-26 as a cohesive unit presents some extremely valuable insights for us today.

1. Prayer does not close our eyes to the dark realities of Gospel Ministry, it challenges us to see past them with a godly vision.
  - a. As we studied on Day One of Week 3, the early believers devoted themselves to steadfast, persevering prayer despite their circumstance. They refused to waste a period of waiting. Do not miss the fact that the devoted communal prayer led to action! In this passage, the gathering of the early believers led them to a sober awareness of their gaps in leadership. Prayer does not blur our challenges but brings them into focus in light of God's grace.
2. The loss of Judas was difficult, but it was not a surprise to God.
  - a. In Luke 22:28-30 Jesus had connected the leadership of his disciples with the twelve tribes of Israel. In Acts 1:20 Peter synchronized what the community was experiencing in the betrayal and loss of Judas with what he had read and understood from scripture. Because he looked at his situation through the lens of scripture, Peter was able to see the need for leadership. Although it doesn't seem that casting lots is the wisest form of selecting leaders, we would do well to learn from the way in which the prayer of the early community led to action!
    - i. We will cover more on this Day 3 of this week's devotions.

**Big Idea:** Prayer should remind us of God's plan, reshape our perspective, and reengage our lives in ministry. Don't just think about what prayer is, pray!

**Activity and Question:** Pray that God would help you pray. Study Psalms 69 and 109. Both of these texts were foundational in Peter's ability to interpret the situation and both are quoted in Acts 1. Why do you think Luke quoted the Psalms here? Why might this inclusion of the Psalter be significant?

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<sup>99</sup> See Acts 1:15-20.

<sup>100</sup> See Acts 1:18-19.

<sup>101</sup> See Acts 1:26.

### Day 3: Challenging Features in Acts 1:12-26

Read: Matthew 27:1-10

Today's study will be a change in pace from what we have done before. Typically, we move through one section or passage to establish a main idea and its implications. The reality is that Acts 1:12-26 presents at least two unique challenges that deserve our attention. Though today's focus may appear random, they raise some important questions in our central passage.

1. Why does Luke talk about *Akeldama* (The Field of Blood)?
  - a. *Akeldama* is an Aramaic word which would have been translated by Luke for his non-Jewish readers. The name, meaning "Field of Blood," describes the place in which Judas "fell headlong" or "became prone" in death. Matthew 27:1-10 gives a fuller account of Judas's death.
  - b. For both Jewish and secular sources, death stories were typically graphic and inopportune. The more wicked a person was in a narrative, the more graphic their death would be detailed. When Luke tells of the death of Judas, he follows this style which would have been expected by the ancient audience.
  - c. Many scholars have used Luke's wording to contrast Judas with the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:33. Linguistically, Luke chose the same Greek phrasing to describe Judas's guts being spilled and the Good Samaritan who is moved in his gut with pity. This phrasing may have been used by Luke to contrast the seemingly disconnected characters in the mind of the listener.
2. Is casting lots a good method for selecting leadership?
  - a. It is not a challenge to find biblical examples of decisions being made by casting lots. Jonah was thrown overboard after lots were cast, Saul was selected as king through lots, and Proverbs 16:33 reads, "the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." Is the unknown, randomized method the best possible way to select leaders? The answer is an emphatic, "NO." We have good reason to believe the selection of Matthias in Acts was an exception rather than a precedent. Here are a few reasons.
    1. The apostles were a collection of people uniquely chosen by Jesus himself during his earthly ministry. The appointment to complete the twelve from Luke 22:28-30. This was a unique moment in church history.
    2. After this moment in scripture, lots are never used in the process of selected church leadership. When discussing how to select leadership in the church, scripture uses words like "appoint."
    3. We have God's word, His Spirit, and His community to discern that which is wise. We don't need the rolling of dice to make wise decisions.
    4. In Acts, the most important and dominant feature in leadership selection is not the lot casting system, but rather on finding a person who had experienced the glory of God in Christ's resurrection. That is the key ingredient of church leadership.

- b. For a great discussion of this question and many more like it, check out The Gospel Coalition's discussion on "Should Churches select Elders by Casting Lots?"

Big Idea: Take time to Pray today.

Question: When you read through Acts 1:12-26 what are some other features that stick out to you? What do you notice as challenging or thought-provoking?

## **Day 4: Servant Leadership**

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16 (With focus paid to vv. 7-16)

When writing to the church in ancient Ephesus, the Apostle Paul emphasized how Christ had given people into different areas of leadership in order to bring the body of Christ together in “works of service.” In several ways, Paul is mirroring the truths that we can see in Acts 1:12-26.

1. Like Acts 1:12-26, Ephesians 4:8-13 uses the Psalms to connect the ascension of Christ with the grace of God for leadership. The interrelatedness of the Hebrew Scriptures with the New Testament is important as we see how God has been foreshadowing his faithfulness. The physical departure of Christ would have been challenging for the early church, but it was ultimately for their good.
2. Ephesians 4:11-13 we can see the connection between gifting, fellowship, and the willingness to step up in service. Acts 1:12-26 provides a picture of what it looks like to have prayer motivate a community to fill a need. Godly leadership is given (1) to equip the people for service and (2) to foster mature unity.

In the wake of Judas’s betrayal and Jesus’s physical departure, the early church banded together in unity, shared life through prayer, and were willing to step up in order to meet needs. Our community would do well to learn from the model of servant leadership in Acts 1.

We cannot escape the fact that unity is connected not only to sharing life together, but also to serving together. Few things unify a community quite like service in community. Serving together is not just a trendy strategy for building the church, but a sanctifying tool for fulfilling the call of God toward unity and maturity.

Big Idea: Leadership should be anchored in God’s grace, oriented toward unity, and embodied through service.

Questions: Where do your passions and the needs of your community connect? In what ways could you link arms with others to meet a need or fill a void? In what ways are you serving our church?

Activity: Read John 17:20-26. What is it that Jesus ultimately prayed for his believers and the future community of faith? How might servant leadership fit within that prayer?

## **Day 5: Handling Hardship**

Read: Psalm 34

In the face of a painfully personal loss, the early community turned consistently to the Psalms. This is not an accident. In the Psalms, the full range of human emotion is brought into conversation before God. Today's study is an invitation to enter into this sort of conversation with Christ.

Throughout Israelite history, the Psalms were rehearsed in community to give praise in times of joy, voice in times of need, and words in times of despair. Jesus, in the most painful moment on the cross, quoted a lyric from Psalm 22:1. If the early church rehearsed them and Jesus recited them, should we not also take time to have the Psalms become a part of our communion with God.

Specifically, in Acts 1:12-26 the Psalms appear as Peter describes both the loss of Judas and the call to meet a need. For many in our community, the loss of a loved one can be beyond crippling. Although there are many different aspects of the healing process, please know that scripture was designed not only to reveal truth and proclaim Christ, but also to hope to the hurting by God's grace. One of the best ways to have assurance amidst uncertainty and strength amidst temptation is to memorize scripture.

Big Idea: The memorization of scripture is a helpful tool for handling hardships in life.

Activity: Memorize Psalm 34:18 "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Question: What are some things that make it difficult for you to memorize and internalize scripture? What could be done to counteract these challenges?

## Week 4: Acts 2:1-13

### Day 1: Pentecost: The Church Has Left the Building

Read: Acts 2:1-13

Fifty days after the celebration of the Passover holiday, people from various regions of ancient Israel would travel to celebrate God's presence and provision together in Jerusalem. Journeying from distant lands, people from various lands celebrated the fiftieth day, the Day of Pentecost.<sup>102</sup>

When we open Acts 2 the fiftieth day has arrived, the expectation is high, and thousands of people have gathered to celebrate the day of Pentecost. There are a few things that are important to know in order to understand the significance of Pentecost.

1. Pentecost is about fulfillment:
  - a. In the scriptures, numbers are significant and purposeful. Specifically, the number "7" is often utilized in the Bible to symbolize completeness or fulfillment. Pentecost, for example, is a celebration that occurs after the completion of the seventh seven-day period.
  - b. For forty days, the early church had studied the teachings of Jesus (1:3). They received the calling to a world-wide proclamation of the Gospel, but since the ascension they have been waiting for the day of promise (1:5; 1:8), the day of fulfillment. In Pentecost, we see that the day has come. The time of waiting is over and the day of promise for the early church was at hand. Pentecost is all about God's fulfillment.
2. Pentecost is about mission:
  - a. Pentecost was one of the most popular pilgrim festivals in the first-century Jewish communities. All work ceased and many gathered from various regions and walks of life. It was precisely into this environment that the global expansion of the mission of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, begins. The followers of Jesus, in Acts 2:1-13, are enabled to speak in many different languages through the gift of tongues. Through this gift of the spirit in Acts 2:1-13 language is not a barrier to a person's ability to hear and receive the Gospel. Pentecost is all about the mission of God on earth.

**Big Idea:** The presence of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of God for the mission of Jesus in the world.

**Activity:** In order to understand the Holy Spirit's role in the mission of the church, it is helpful to look at a handful of other references in Luke's earlier Gospel writing. For today's activity look at Luke 1:15; 1:35; 1:41; 1:67; 2:25-35; and 3:21-22.

**Question:** After reading the passages from the Gospel of Luke, what do you notice about the effects, role, and/or attributes of the Holy Spirit?

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<sup>102</sup> See Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18,22-24; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28-29; Deuteronomy 16:9-12; I Corinthians 16 and Acts 20.

## Day 2: Significance Beyond a Stereotype

Read: Acts 2:1-13 (with a focus on vv. 7-8)

“Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?”<sup>103</sup> This question should jump from the page when we read Acts 2:1-13, but it often goes unnoticed.

Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? It is a short and simple question that is significant, nonetheless. The disciples, being filled with the Holy Spirit, were able to bridge the gap between culture and language and the crowd is left understandably bewildered. They were confused not only by the message, but also the messengers.

1. First, Galileans were systematically looked down upon by Judeans as people of questionable ancestry.
  - a. They were deemed as second-class citizens in a world that valued lineage and family honor.
2. Second, Galileans were stereotyped as uneducated.
  - a. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Peter is recognized as a Galilean after Jesus’s arrest. It is probable Galileans had a twang noticeable by others.<sup>104</sup>
3. Third, the Galileans had a reputation for protesting and making trouble. Whether it was in their educational and ancestral deficiencies or their controversial reputation, Galileans would have been unlikely communicators of a multi-lingual Gospel.
  - a. Notice that Peter, a very noticeable Galilean, is God’s chosen voice for the Gospel proclamation in Acts 2:14-41.

When the Galilean believers spoke in languages understood by all, some listeners were intrigued while others were dismissive.<sup>105</sup> How could God use the uneducated, the illegitimate, and the troublemaker? These questions, and so many more are silenced through a Gospel that is shared despite a stigma.

Whether it is in the first-century Greco-Roman world or society today, stereotypes hold power. Remember, God is not stopped by a stereotype. He sees significance beyond it.

**Big Idea:** No stereotype holds more power than God’s ability to transform ordinary people for an extraordinary work.

**Question:** Why do you think God chooses to use unlikely people in the proclamation of his truth?

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<sup>103</sup> See Acts 2:7.

<sup>104</sup> See Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:70 and Luke 22:59.

<sup>105</sup> See the range of responses in Acts 2:12-13.



### Day 3: Spiritual Gifts

Read: I Corinthians 12:4-31

In I Corinthians 12, Paul discusses the spiritual gifts of the individual as they fit within the unity and mission of the church collectively. Acts 2 is a brilliant and powerful example of the ways in which the Holy Spirit equips believers for ministry.

Whether it is prophecy, speaking in tongues, discernment, healing, or wisdom, there are a few Biblical guidelines that help them to function properly. Three of the guidelines governing all spiritual gifts are Clarity, Unity, and the Centrality of Christ.

1. Clarity
  - a. Spiritual gifts, although different, should all function to bring clarity and not confusion. In Acts 2, the confusion was about who was speaking and not specifically about what they were saying. Scripture consistently emphasizes the ways in which the spiritual gifts are designed to bring further clarity to the Gospel. In I Corinthians 14:19 Paul writes, “But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”<sup>106</sup> Spiritual gifts, whether tongues or teaching, are intended to bring clarity and not chaos.
2. Unity
  - a. Instead of using the spiritual gifts to build up the community of faith, the Corinthian Church was using them to assert that one individual was better than another. Paul does not critique the usage of spiritual gifts, but the manner in which gifts are inappropriately used to disunify the body of believers. The function of tongues in Acts 2:1-41 is to unify people by the grace and peace of God.
3. Centrality of Christ
  - a. The Holy Spirit teaches, reminds, convicts, guides, intercedes, and sanctifies. As discussed earlier in our study of Acts, Jesus thought it better that he depart, so that the Holy Spirit could come in the hearts and lives of believers. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are designed to make much of Christ and help believers experience the grace of God in becoming more like Jesus.

Big Idea: Spiritual gifts should bring clarity, create unity, and stress the centrality of Christ.

Question: What other guidelines for spiritual gifts and their use in the church can you think of?

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<sup>106</sup> It should be noted that the Pentecost experience of tongues is most likely different from the unintelligible language that Paul critiques in the Corinthian Church.

#### **Day 4: The Holy Spirit and the Promise of Peace**

Read: Haggai 2:1-9

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.”—Haggai 2:6-7

Haggai is a smaller prophetic book, but it is very important for the overall story of the Hebrew Scriptures. For generations, the prophets had been calling on Israel to follow God and warning them that God would send the nation of Babylon to take out Jerusalem and move them into exile. Yet, even for a people in exile, there is still hope.

After Babylon was defeated by Persia, the Israelite people were allowed to journey back to Jerusalem. After they returned, however, their priorities were out of order and their land was unproductive. Haggai not only identifies their misplaced priorities, but also highlights the hope that can be found in God’s future promise.

Haggai 2:5-7 reminds the people, “‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear. This is what the Lord Almighty says: In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Similar to the setting in for Haggai, Acts 2:1-13 also opens in Jerusalem. The nations are gathered together, the people are together in expectation, and the goodness of God’s glory is on display through the Holy Spirit. In Haggai 2:9 peace is promised before the people even thought it was possible. In Acts 2 that peace is spoken to the nations by the Holy Spirit.

Big Idea: Acts 2 is a fulfillment of what God had promised long before!

Question: How does knowing Acts 2 is a fulfillment of God’s promise in the Hebrew Scriptures influence your understanding of Pentecost?

## **Day 5: Seeing Pentecost Through Other Scripture**

Read: Assorted Passages Included Below

The opening portions of Acts set up a pattern for how the church that is devoted to Jesus can function. Not only were they dedicated to the study of God's Word, but also to prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus name. This week's daily studies have been filled with a lot of reading and thinking. We have reached day 5, but only scratched the surface of the value and power to be found within Acts 2.

To search and know the scriptures, prayer is required. Philosopher and Theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote, "There is no way that Christians, in a private capacity, can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ as by prayer."

The aim of today's study is to spend some time looking through scripture and praying.

Big Idea: Learning to live in dependence upon the Holy Spirit is to live a prayer-filled life.

Activity: Read the following passages and write down what you notice about the role of the Holy Spirit in each. Take time to not only read the Biblical passages but meditate on them in prayer.

- John 14:26
- John 16:7-8
- I Corinthians 2:10-11
- Ephesians 1:17-20
- Romans 8:26-27
- Galatians 5:16-21

## Week 5: Acts 2:14-28

### Day 1: The Prophet Joel and the Early Church

Read: Acts 2:14-28 (Focus on Joel 2:28-32)

As an often impulsive, and undeniably uneducated fisherman, Peter would have been relatively low on the list of possible candidates to explain God's word to a group of thousands. Yet, God, by His Spirit, delights to use the underqualified for his purposes. This is the first sermon by an apostle, and it would have most likely been delivered on the outer court of the temple. With speculation filling the air, Peter stepped out in boldness to connect God's revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures with what was occurring before their very eyes.

We would do well to remember that the Day of Pentecost was met with mixed reviews. While some saw the obvious work of God, others assumed the work was alcohol. It was exactly into this sort of setting that God, by His Spirit enabled Peter to recall and reiterate the truth of the prophet Joel to a people in need. There are a few things to notice about Joel 2:28-32 that can be really helpful for our ability to understand this passage.

1. Joel's prophecy was originally given following a locust plague that had decimated the land. There was widespread famine and the prophecy was communicated as both a sobering word of truth and a hopeful envisioning of God's future plan in what is known as the "Messianic Age."
2. Joel 2:28-32 is one of many calls for repentance inside the Old Testament book. You will notice in Acts 2:21 that Peter also chooses to climax his proclamation of Joel 2 with an emphasis on God's faithfulness as we call upon him in repentance.
3. Peter faithfully mirrors Joel 2:28-32, but he does make some minor changes. This is very significant. For example, instead of saying, "And afterward" to directly quote Joel, Peter starts with, "In the last days." There is a lot of theological debate about this change of wording by Peter, but the most likely explanation is that Peter saw the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Christ as the start of the "last days." Peter saw the gifts of the Spirit and the rapid expansion of the Gospel of Jesus as a sign that the early church was a part of the last days promised many years earlier.

By his own power and intellect, Peter should have never been able to explain how prophecy was being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. See in Peter's quoting of Joel that regardless of gender, socio-economic status, age, or education, God works through people. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, scripture was explained, Christ was exalted, and many were challenged to repent and believe.

**Big Idea:** Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit, beyond his qualifications, to boldly apply the truth of God's word to people in need.

**Question:** Realizing that there are some minor changes that Peter made when he quoted Joel can be a complicated thing. Why might this be a challenging subject to tackle? Why do you think Peter felt it was okay to change "and afterward" to "in the last days?"

## Day 2: Peter's Speech

Read: Matthew 27:11-26

Twice in Peter's speech in Acts 2 he references how Jesus was killed by sinful people. In both Acts 2:23 and 2:36 Peter connects the lordship and victory of Christ over death with the broken spiritual condition of the crowd. We often wrestle with a sense of conviction, but could you imagine what it would have felt like to be in the crowd as Peter connected the work of resurrection with your own decision to crucify the Christ? It would be heartbreaking. It would be gut-wrenching.

Our reading for today in Matthew's account of the life of Christ took us through a portion of the story Jesus's trial before Pilate and the eventual release of Barabbas. At the height of Pilate's interaction with the angry crowd, the enraged group proclaims in Matthew 27:25, "His [Jesus's] blood be on us and on our children." Pilate had given them an opportunity to release Jesus, the only sinless and blameless one to ever live. Instead, they chose to release Barabbas a well-known criminal and insurrectionist. They chose to release the guilty and punish the innocent.

Peter reiterates in Acts 2:23, that the innocent Christ was then put to death by means of crucifixion. In the minds of the Jews, Jesus was nothing more than a man who claimed to be God. In the minds of the Romans, Jesus was a leader who threatened political stability. Crucifixion was designed to be public, it engineered to be excruciating, and it was configured to bring maximum shame. Notice that Peter does not skip over the brutality of the cross to talk about the love of Christ. Rather, Peter points directly at the cross and sees the love of Christ for all, even those in the crowd.

If, but just for a second, allow yourself to hear Acts 2:23-24 as though you were in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. *"This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."* Over the crowd on Pentecost, the words would have fallen heavy, heartbreaking, gut-wrenching, and hope-giving all at the same time. We, like the listeners in the crowd, are guilty of much, but have been offered grace still. Praise God!

Activity: Spend some time in repentance after reading through Acts 2:23-24. Pray that God would expose sin in your life that you would experience his grace and the renewal found through repentance.

Question: What is the difference between guilt and conviction? Take a moment to write down a few thoughts to share with your LifeGroup.

### Day 3: “Deliberate Plan and Foreknowledge”

Read: Acts 2:23-24 and Genesis 3:15

Before we begin, for the next two days we are going to slow the pace and pay particular attention to two different ideas present in the text. Today we will focus on the terms “Deliberate plan and foreknowledge.” Tomorrow we focus on the phrase, “Death could not hold him.” Both days may be a little more complex, but working to study, understand, and apply scripture by the Holy Spirit is a worth it.

#### Deliberate Plan: *Horizō (deliberate) boulē (plan)*

- Depending on your English translation of Acts 2:23, you may read deliberate plan (NIV), prearranged plan (NLT), definite plan (ESV) or predetermined plan (NASB). Each of these translations are good, but a quick observation of the original reading will prove helpful in our work to understand the preaching of Peter.
- The Greek verb “*horizō*,” is the word that can mean to define, determine, and ordain. From “*horizō*,” the English word “horizon” has been developed. In the same way that a horizon defines the visual break between the earth’s surface and sky, the verb “*horizō*” is meant to communicate the clarity and precision that goes along with the plan of God in Christ. God’s redemption plan in Christ is clear, focused, and defined.

#### Foreknowledge: *Prognōsis (Foreknowledge)*

- Although the Greek word “*prognosis*” occurs only twice in the New Testament, it is far more common in the today’s language. A prognosis is a prediction or projection of what is going to occur. For example, a doctor could issue a prognosis for the likely outcome of an illness or infection.
- Do not miss the fact that God had both fully known and fully planned to reconcile a lost humanity to himself by having Jesus killed by crucifixion. In fact, the whole story of scripture tells of this deliberate plan and foreknowledge of God.

Genesis 3:15 is included in today’s reading, because this passage is known as the *protoevangelion*. Protoevangelion literally means “first gospel.” It refers to the first time where the Gospel is prophesied in the Bible. According to Genesis 3:15, the seed of Eve would one day crush the head of the enemy. From the Garden of Eden to the Day of Pentecost and beyond, we can celebrate the fact that God not only foreknew, but he also enacted a deliberate plan to redeem people through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the glory of the Gospel!

Big Idea: God knew and deliberately planned to reconcile lost people through the sacrifice and victory of Jesus on the cross.

Question: Peter chose words on purpose when he shared the truth with the crowd on Pentecost. What stands out to you about the words we studied today?

## Day 4: Death: The Curse Reversed

Read: Acts 2:23-24 and Hebrews 2:9-11

Today we are going to turn our focus to the phrase, “Death could not hold him.” This phrase has appeared in many hymns, poems, and sermons through Christian history. It is profound and it is worth a deeper look.

Even though Jesus was crucified at the hands of sinful men<sup>107</sup>, God was always at work in the backdrop. The tomb that held Jesus’s body was sealed. It was guarded. The story was over so they must have thought.

When it looked like the movement of Jesus had come to a close, it was only the beginning. Jesus was raised from the dead, loosed from the pain<sup>108</sup> of death, because it was impossible for death to keep him. This is a glorious truth, but what does it mean? To understand this, we need to journey back again to the horror that occurred in the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 2:17 God instructed Adam and Eve that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. The serpent, however, told Eve that God was hiding the real truth. At its core, the serpent tempted them to distrust what God had said (Genesis 3:4-5). They were deceived and they ate (Genesis 3:6-7). The penalty for sin was separation from God, pathological selfishness, and ultimately death. Trusting God with all their heart would have protected them. They would have experienced life — abundant life, complete with the joy of relationship with God. Instead of choosing to believe God, they chose to embrace lies. Utterly incapable of earning right relationship with God, people have always fallen short of God’s design.

Whereas people are incapable of earning relationship with God, Jesus was faithful throughout his life to never sin. Experiencing all of the hardship and all of the temptation that people encounter in life, Jesus persevered without distrusting God. Despite his sinlessness, Jesus was willing to experience the pain and penalty of death so that sinful people could encounter the grace of God which culminates in eternal life. Speaking of Jesus victory over death and grave, John Piper writes, “It’s not hard to figure out: He can break out because he wasn’t forced in.”<sup>109</sup> For those who have believed in Christ and his sacrifice, death’s curse has been reversed!

**Big Idea:** Although sinless, Jesus experienced death and reversed the curse.

**Question:** To reverse a curse, in its fullest sense, is to transform it into a blessing. Is it possible for believer’s in Christ to look at death as a blessing? Why or Why not?

**Optional Question:** What are some questions or thoughts that you have as you read today’s study and the Bible verses that you could bring to your LifeGroup? Make a few notes for when your LifeGroup meets again.

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<sup>107</sup> Acts 2:23

<sup>108</sup> This word for pain (*ōdin*) is most often related to the pains of childbirth in the New Testament.

<sup>109</sup> Taken from the Desiring God Resources Page in an article entitled “Can’t Keep Jesus Down!”

## **Day 5: Help Required!**

Read: Psalm 16

Psalm 16 mirrors Christian life in so many ways. In one small Psalm we see David earnestly asking for help and expressing deeply profound confidence all in the same breath. Psalm 16 is a picture of what it looks like to move from instability to security based on the assurance of God's goodness.

When Peter quotes Psalm 16, it is both a plea for safety and a joyous proclamation of God's goodness. In Acts 2, Peter uses Psalm 16:8-11 and applies it directly to the work of Jesus. Peter is spending every word in his speech at Pentecost to get the crowd to see what God has done in Christ.

Although this Psalm 16 is written by David in the midst of his own difficult situation, Peter applies the passage directly to the life of Christ. "Holy One" could refer to David as the anointed King over Israel, but for Peter it was even more appropriate as a designation for Christ. In expectancy, ancient Israel was waiting for a liberator and king who would be born from David's family line. Israel had been promised a rescuer from David's family. They were promised a king.

In Psalm 16, David from desperate pleas for help to deeply rooted assurance and joy. This conversion of uncertainty to assurance occurs because there is an underlying confidence that God does not abandon his people in death. God is in the business of making the path of life known, even when life is uncertain and challenging. Peter is proclaiming the very same thing. In Christ, we are not abandoned to death, but can experience joy through the "paths of life" which have been revealed in Jesus.

Don't miss the fact that, Peter does not hesitate to connect the truth of the Old Testament the revelation given in the New Testament. When Peter quotes Psalm 16, it is not an accident. He does not randomly break into song lyrics. Everything is purposeful. It is subtle, but notice the fact that Peter was able to recite the Psalm by memory. For the crowd that had gathered, he was attaching the reputation and authority of King David with what he was preaching about Jesus. This was and still is a big deal!

This Psalm of David would most likely have been rehearsed throughout Israelite history and reapplied within the life of Christ. We would do well to continue the pattern of remembering, with joy, the promises of God that were fulfilled in Christ. Let's begin that habit today.

Big Idea: In saving people from the death and decay, God is not only a redeemer, but a promise keeper.

Activity: Read through Acts 2:26-28. Take time to read through these three verses a few times and commit them to memory. Pray that God would help you remember and apply his word. It may be a challenge, but it is worth it.



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