

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Biblical Literacy: Developing a Habit of Personal Bible Reading Among the Members of
Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship**

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

by
Christopher L. Coleman

Lynchburg, Virginia
September 2020

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Samuel Olarewaju, Mentor

Dr. Leo Percer, Reader

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Christopher L. Coleman

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, September 2020

Mentor: Dr. Samuel Olarewaju

Biblical literacy is an important value in the life of any person, and especially in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ. However, all too often, believers lack a firm grasp of Scripture knowledge and understanding, and consequently, are unprepared to detect and avoid erroneous teaching and to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). One of the reasons for this pervasive lack of biblical literacy among many believers is because there is a lack in the development of a habit in personal Bible reading outside of the weekly church services. Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis project to transition the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship from only reading the Bible during Sunday and mid-week services to reading it personally and regularly on a weekly basis outside of the scheduled church services. In order to achieve this goal for the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, the questionnaire research method was conducted on 12 voluntary members of the church, along with a four week Bible reading exercise. The results were collected confidentially, analyzed, and reported, comparing the pre-four week Bible reading exercise to the post-four week Bible reading exercise.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Joshua 1:8 says, “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”¹ God says these words to Joshua “after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD”² as he and the people of Israel are preparing to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land God had promised Abraham, over four hundred years earlier. God promised Abraham that He would give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants forever. So, as the time had finally come for the people of God to enter Canaan, also referred to as the “Promise Land,” God commands Joshua, Moses’ successor, regarding His word, and particularly how he and the people of Israel are to relate to it. Joshua and the people of Israel are to relate to the word of God in three ways: they are to keep it in their mouth (speech); they are to meditate(think) on it; they are to act upon (do) it. In doing these things, their success in taking possession of the “Promise Land” is guaranteed.

According to the afore-referenced Scripture passage, there is a divine expectation for the people of God to speak the word of God; to think on the word of God; to act upon the word of God for a fulfilled life. However, how can this divine directive be carried out unless there is first knowledge of the word of God through regular personal reading of it? Although there are other

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

² Joshua 1:1

means of gaining knowledge of the word of God besides reading it,³ however, for the sake of this research, the exercise of reading (the Bible) will be the tool used to address the problem later presented in this research project.

According to a study conducted by Barna over a five-year span (2011 - 2016), in conjunction with the American Bible Society, 61 percent of adults (2016) within the United States have a desire to read the Bible more than they currently do.⁴ Although this percentage is a decline from 67 percent in 2011, it still shows that most Americans have a desire to read the Bible more on a personal level. This is because “even with skepticism on the rise, Americans still hold the Bible in high regard,”⁵ and “... agree that the Bible contains everything you need to know to live a meaningful life ...”⁶ To show the influential place the Bible has in America, Lori Wagoner writes on the need for the Bible to be taught in public schools, not for indoctrination, but for the education of the influence the Bible has had on Western civilization, and that to be educated in such, one should have a basic level of biblical literacy.⁷ Timothy Love also shares Wagoner’s position on the need for biblical literacy to be a part of the general academia, given the overwhelming influence the Bible has had on the development of Western civilization and its literature.⁸ It also bears pointing out that Americans are not the only ones who have high regard

³ An example of learning besides the means of reading can be seen in the exercise of oral tradition, which emphasizes learning through the faculty of hearing.

⁴ Barna Group, “*Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution*,” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM>.gmail.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lori D. Wagoner, “*Biblical Literacy in the Public Schools: Bringing the Bible Back into English Literature Courses*.” Order No. 1470589, Georgetown University, 2009.

⁸ Timothy Love, “*In Defense of Biblical Literacy in English and American Literary Studies*.” Order No. 13849547, University of Missouri - Columbia, 2017.

for the Bible, but “the Bible holds a central place in contemporary African Christian life and thought”⁹ as well.

However, even with these high percentages of Americans having a favorable disposition toward the Bible and its reading on a personal level, only 23 percent saw an increase in their personal Bible reading as of 2016, while 66 percent said their personal reading stayed the same. This means that most Americans, while desiring to read the Bible more on a personal basis, did not accomplish that goal. Unfortunately, it is just as George Gallup and Jim Castelli said in a survey finding, “Americans revere the Bible but, by and large, they don’t read it.”¹⁰ Jeffrey McDonald echoes this reality when he says, “... Americans are spending less time with the Bible ... than they used to.”¹¹ These are staggering statistics when one juxtaposes the previous generation to that of the current population, in how among the latter, there is “a smaller proportion ... even among regular churchgoers,” who regularly read the Bible.¹² Cecilia Dennery further highlights the unfortunate reality of biblical illiteracy even among Christians by saying, “In spite of their conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, it is amazing how little interest evangelicals show in learning what scripture has to say or wrestling with what the text means.”¹³ Dennery’s observation of many Christians’ lack of involvement with the Bible is quite sobering,

⁹ David Tonghou Ngong, 2014. “*Reading the Bible in Africa: A Critique of Enchanted Bible Reading.*” Exchange 43 (2): 66–83.

¹⁰ Hans Collin Hansen. 2010, “*Why Johnny Can’t Read the Bible: Most Americans--Including Scripture-Loving Evangelicals--Cannot Name the Disciples, the Ten Commandments, or the First Book of the Bible: But That’s Not Our Biggest Biblical Illiteracy Problem.*” Christianity Today 54 (5): 38–41.

¹¹ G. J. Macdonald, “*Luther’s Legacy: How People use the Bible Today, 500 Years After a Monk Sparked the Protestant Reformation.*” The Christian Science Monitor, Oct 29, 2017.

¹² Christine Rosen, “*Open Book.*” The Weekly Standard, Nov 27, 2017. 30.

¹³ Cecilia Arona Baptiste Dennery, “*A Correlational Study of Biblical Literacy and the Level of Leadership, Discipleship, and Demographics in an African American Church in Delaware.*” Order No. 3551279, Wilmington University (Delaware), 2013.

especially given that the “scriptures are indisputably the church’s book . . . ”¹⁴ This would lead one to rightfully think that there would be a better level of engagement of the Bible among people of the Book.

Therefore, with fewer American adults engaging in personal Bible reading outside of Sunday morning and mid-week services, this, unfortunately, leaves a number of American adults biblically illiterate or unable to demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. Derek Suderman echoes this sentiment of the link between biblical literacy and regular Bible reading when he says, “If you engage the Bible consistently, over time people will know their Bible better.”¹⁵

Chris Marshall makes a sobering statement relating to the decline of biblical literacy among Christians when he says, “Perhaps the most obvious symptom of biblical disengagement is the diminishing level of biblical knowledge which the average Christian possesses today.”¹⁶ Concerning this type of diminishing level of biblical knowledge among Christians today, Jared C. Wilson, to some degree, indicts church leaders when he says, “Our people don’t know their Bible very well, and this is in large part the fault of a generation of wispy preaching and teaching.”¹⁷ Kenneth Gourlay also laments this plight of biblical illiteracy, saying, “Biblical

¹⁴ David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The uses of Scripture in modern theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 93.

¹⁵ Donna Schulz, “Saskatchewan Pastors Wrestle with Scripture.” *Canadian Mennonite*, Jun 06, 2016. 15, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1812432409%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹⁶ Chris Marshall, *Re-engaging with the Bible in a Postmodern World* [online]. Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice, Vol. 15, No. 1, Feb 2007: 5-16. Availability: <<https://search-informit-com-au.ezproxy.liberty.edu/documentSummary;dn=306463146087770;res=IELHSS>> ISSN: 1171-7920. [cited 24 Aug 20].

¹⁷ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 76.

illiteracy is a major spiritual problem in America today.”¹⁸ Jeff Scott Kennedy also underlines an interesting find by Pew Research on the ubiquity of biblical illiteracy among Christians, in that “atheists, agnostics, and Jews scored five percent higher on religious knowledge surveys than Christians.”¹⁹ As James Crossley says, “Typically, biblical literacy is discussed in terms of the level of detailed public knowledge of the contents of the Bible.”²⁰ This lack of engagement in personal Bible reading is despite the efforts made by various past Bible scholars. English reformer John Wycliff supported the idea that the Bible should be made available to everyone in their common language.²¹ John Calvin, who “was convinced that just as the gospel of Jesus Christ is available for every kind of person, so the Bible, which proclaims this good news, must be as well.”²²

It also bears saying that with biblical illiteracy comes other spiritual deficiencies, such as a lack of knowing the voice of God and a lack of knowing how to discern false teaching. Jesus says in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” How can one

¹⁸ Kenneth H. Gourlay, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge among Adult Southern Baptist Sunday School Participants I." *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 2013): 7-29, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1344162529%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹⁹ Jeff Scott Kennedy, "The Challenge of Biblical Literacy: Establishing a Standard of Proficiency for Disciples at Eastpoint Church." Order No. 3619355, Biola University, 2014. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1532179612%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

²⁰ James G. Crossley. 2011. "Editorial: Four Articles on 'Biblical Literacy.'" *Postscripts* 7 (2): 171–72. <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3765996&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²¹ Raymond Studzinski. 2014. "Bible Reading Revisited: The Librarian's Guide to Lectio Divina and Formative Styles of Reading." *Theological Librarianship* 7 (1): 56–67.

²² Mark Labberton. 2017. "The Plain Sense?: Scripture May Be Clear, but It's Not Easy." *The Christian Century* 134 (8): 28–31. <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIgOV170427000598&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

hear and follow Jesus if one does not know or have an understanding of His word, which is the Scriptures?

So, with “more than 90 percent of American households contain[ing] at least one copy of the Bible,”²³ why do many adults in America, although having a desire to read the Bible more, fail to implement a consistent weekly reading of the Bible outside of the regularly scheduled church services? What are some of the hindrances that keep this important activity from being personally implemented? Also, what are some of the benefits of implementing this weekly activity? Through action research and the review of various books, articles, dissertations, and journals, these questions, in conjunction with the problem statement, will be addressed in this thesis project with the goal of solving it, or at the least addressing it.

Ministry Context

The ministry context within this thesis project involves the congregation at Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, a ten-year-old, multi-cultural, non-denominational church in Monrovia, California, consisting of African and Hispanic Americans, with most being African-American. The congregation is diverse in age, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens, with a fair amount being in their twenties, thirties, and forties. The educational background of the congregation is also diverse ranging from those with only a high school education to those who have master's degrees.

²³ “*Vatican Survey Compares American and Europeans on Biblical Literacy.*” 2008. *The Christian Century* 125 (11): 17. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001656422&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

History of the Church

The church had its beginnings in February 2009 from a home Bible study that was held weekly on Wednesday nights at 7:00 p.m. in the home of the pastor²⁴ and his family. People from the neighborhood and others within the city of Monrovia were invited to participate in the Bible study.²⁵ This was quite a step of faith for the pastor and his family, not only in hosting a Bible study but to have it in their home, wherein strangers would be invited into that space; however, the results were fruitful.

Three months later, in April 2009, the pastor and his family began to expand the home Bible study to include a Sunday afternoon (between 4:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.) service in their home. The Sunday afternoon service was in addition to the mid-week Bible study already in progress. The reason the Sunday service was conducted in the afternoon was that the pastor and his family attended another church, wherein, at that time, the pastor served as an elder. So, the pastor and his family would attend Sunday morning service at the church where they were members, and then afterward conduct the Sunday afternoon service in their home. The senior pastor of the church that the pastor and his family belonged to at that time was aware that they were conducting a Sunday afternoon church service in their home.

In May 2009, the church name, Contending for the Faith Ministries International, was established through Articles of Incorporation in the State of California; and on the first Sunday in July 2009, Contending for the Faith Ministries International had its first church service as an independent ministry. The pastor and his family moved from the church wherein they were serving and had served for years into leading the ministry that God had placed in their hearts.

²⁴ The pastor is the researcher of this thesis project.

²⁵ A city in the county of Los Angeles, California where the pastor and his family lived from 1999 to 2013.

The services were still held in the home of the pastor and his family; however, it was now both Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. That first Sunday service in July 2009 consisted of the pastor, his wife, his mother, and his four children.

On the first Sunday in August of 2009, the church moved from the pastor's home to the Doubletree Hotel in the city of Monrovia, while the Wednesday evening Bible study continued at the home of the pastor and his family. After the church moved into the Doubletree Hotel, other people were added to the congregation. The majority of the people added to the church were already familiar with it but had not been a church member for quite some time. They were looking for a church home, or they were open to trying an altogether unfamiliar church.

The church remained at the Doubletree Hotel until the first Sunday in June 2012, when God granted the congregation favor to move into a beautiful "church" building in the city of Monrovia, where it remains to this day. The building belongs to and is occupied by a Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has church services on Saturdays while Contending for the Faith leases the building on Sunday mornings. The mid-week Bible study moved from Wednesday evenings to Thursday evenings when the church moved to its current location, as the Seventh-day Adventist Church was already utilizing the building on Wednesday evenings for their mid-week service. In 2013, the pastor and his family moved to another city about 40 miles away, so it was no longer feasible for the church to meet in their home. The church began to hold the mid-week Bible study on Thursday evenings at its current location; however, it became financially unfeasible to continue doing so. Therefore, the church began conducting the weekly Bible study via teleconference on Thursday evenings, which continues to this day.

In 2014, Contending for the Faith Ministries International added the name Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship as a DBA.²⁶ This addition was done to distinguish the local congregation from the international vision of the ministry. So, on a local level, the church is Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship and comes under the global vision and auspices of Contending for the Faith Ministries International.

The name of the church, Contending for the Faith, is taken from Jude 3, wherein the writer encouraged the church to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” When the writer refers to “the faith,” one of the things he is referring to is the sound doctrine or teaching. It is divinely imperative for the believer in Christ to have sound doctrine, and one of the ways this is done is to have a firm grasp of the knowledge of the Bible. During a period of time when the pastor was constantly in the midst of defending sound doctrine in the church, it was impressed upon him by the Spirit of God that if he ever was to be entrusted with a ministry/church, he was to name it in accordance with Jude 3; and that he did.

Description of the Church

The congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship is diverse. Currently, as previously mentioned, although it is open to every ethnicity, it is mostly comprised of African and Hispanic Americans. The ages are diverse, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens. However, the oldest member is in their late sixties. So, relatively speaking, the congregation is rather young.

The congregation is rather small, ranging between 15 – 20 members. This is what it has consistently been since its inception, give or take a few. The quantity may be small, but the quality is big. Diversity within the congregation is also seen in the member's familiarity and

²⁶ Abbreviation for “Doing Business As.”

unfamiliarity with “church.” Some within the congregation come from a “church” background, while some do not, resulting in some knowing what to expect in church and others not being so informed. It bears to point out that all of the members are English speaking, with one being bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. It should also be noted that the socio-economic status of the average member is middle class.

Present State of the Church

There is a low level of biblical literacy within the congregation, in spite of the biblical teaching given every week on Sunday morning and Thursday evening. The low level of biblical literacy within the congregation was always known over the years, given the fact that a number of the congregants were not regular churchgoers before joining this congregation. However, the realization of the low level of biblical literacy was highlighted sometime around 2017, when the local church began a study in the book of Philemon, and one of the members said (adamantly) that the book was not in her Bible. Upon hearing the member say this, the pastor thought that the page might have inadvertently been torn out of her Bible or something of that nature. However, when the pastor informed her of the spelling of Philemon, she then informed the Bible study group that she had indeed located the book in her Bible. Due to the pronunciation of Philemon, the member thought that the name began with an “F.” It became clear to the pastor that a low level of biblical literacy existed within the congregation.

As mentioned above, in addition to Sunday services, this congregation has Bible study every Thursday evening; however, it is conducted via telephone conference. By being conducted via teleconference, anyone and everyone can attend wherever they are. The Bible study systematically covers a book of the Bible selected by this researcher and is read through and elaborated verse by verse and chapter by chapter every week. At the end of each study on

Thursday evening, time is allocated for members to ask questions or give comments on the study for that evening. This format of the Bible study is to facilitate an atmosphere wherein the congregation can increase biblical literacy and all of the benefits that accompany it. However, despite the convenient avenue of calling in, most of the congregation still do not attend Bible study. So, with non-attendance to Bible study, coupled with a lack of reading the Bible on a personal level, most within the congregation remain biblically illiterate.

Problem Presented

The problem addressed in this thesis project is that there is a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship due to a lack of regular personal Bible reading outside of the weekly Sunday and mid-week services.

Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Here, the Psalmist is expressing his desire for the word of God. However, he is not only expressing his desire for the word of God, but he is expressing the results of his engaging the word of God. Although it is not stated that the Psalmist engaged the word of God by reading it, as it may have been read and explained to him by the priests in that day, he does, however, set an example of a principle that can be applied to reading the word of God. The principle he sets is knowing and understanding the word of God or possessing a healthy level of biblical literacy, which is explained further in the following verse (Ps 119:104), wherein he speaks about obtaining understanding through the precepts of God.

As previously mentioned, Barna, in conjunction with the American Bible Society, conducted a five-year study showing that most American adults have a desire to read the Bible

more than they actually practice reading it.²⁷ The reason for this is because, fortunately, most Americans maintain a high view of the Bible and believe that it still has the answers to one possessing a meaningful life. This is the perspective of the majority in America despite a growing level of societal skepticism and abandonment of the Judeo-Christian principles upon which the nation was founded. For the practicing Christian, this is all the more true due to the position on the inspiration of Scripture, and it is the rule of faith, which is the practice of the Church. The same can be said of the local congregation addressed in this thesis regarding its view and disposition toward Scripture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin action research project is to transition the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship from only reading the Bible during Sunday and mid-week services to reading personally and regularly on a weekly basis outside of the scheduled services. This will produce a level of biblical literacy in the congregation whereby they will be better prepared to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). This means that the members will have a greater discernment when it comes to sound biblical teaching and will therefore be in a better position to defend the faith when the time comes.

Basic Assumptions

This thesis project will involve basic assumptions which do not require proof but should be considered a given to the reader. Some of these basic assumptions entail the following:

1. The Participants Literacy Aptitude and Access to the Bible

²⁷ Barna Group, “*Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution*,” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM.gmail>.

It is assumed that the participants are able to read at an eighth-grade level and above. It is also assumed that the participants have access to the Bible.

2. The Participants Spiritual State

As the research of this thesis project will involve the participation of the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, it is assumed that the participants are in right standing with God through receiving the finished work of Christ.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher of this project is the pastor of the participants; therefore, it is assumed that the participants are familiar with the researcher, as the researcher is also familiar with them.

The researcher and the participants share a mutual respect for each other and thus are in the right relationship with each other. Therefore, it is assumed that there is no conflict between the two parties, thus allowing for cooperation from the participants.

Definitions

Application. Application is a concept that refers to the reader applying what he/she reads in the Bible.

Bible reading. Bible reading is defined as either devotional or intellectual reading, as long as it is engaged on a regular basis. A regular basis constitutes a weekly engagement of the Bible in addition to Sunday and mid-week services.

Biblical literacy. Biblical literacy is defined as having a basic knowledge of the Bible, with an understanding of how its fundamental message of the gospel connects throughout the entire book.

Coding or Themes. Coding or Themes are common words used between the participants that will be gathered to develop themes within the project.

Connection with God. Connection with God is a concept that refers to the reader communicating/communing with God, as they consistently and personally read the Bible on a weekly basis.

Knowing God. Knowing God is a concept that refers to the reader having knowledge and understanding of God, as they consistently and personally read the Bible on a weekly basis.

Participants. Participants are members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship. Members are those who refer to Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship as their home church.

“Silence.” Silence is a “reality” among the participants, which this researcher observed, but for unknown reasons since none was disclosed in the questionnaire.²⁸

“Slippage.” Slippage shows the opposite of what would be seen in themes.²⁹

Spiritual Growth and Maturity. Spiritual Growth and Maturity is a concept that refers to the reader increasing spiritually, as they consistently and personally read the Bible every week.

Limitations

The researcher is utilizing the Questionnaire tool for data collection.³⁰ The limitation anticipated with this tool is that all of the participants who receive a questionnaire paper may not return it, thus reducing the data quantity that can be incorporated within the thesis project. Also, some participants who return the questionnaire may not completely answer all of the questions. This is because of the normal level of busyness in the lives of people; wherein there is a tendency

²⁸ Liberty University School of Divinity Doctor of Ministry Program and Thesis Project Handbook 2018, 43.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 113.

to forget or put off something such as answering and returning a voluntary questionnaire. However, even if the participant returns the questionnaire, one or more of the answers will probably be unanswered because either they did not understand the question or they simply overlooked the question due to human error.

Delimitations

This thesis project will have delimitations, in that the research conducted within it will have limits imposed by the researcher. The delimitations will include the following: participants, age range of the participants, the genders of the participants, the local church of the participants, and the research method.

The participants will be limited to the members within the local church of the researcher, of which there are some pros and cons.

The pros of limiting the participants to members within the local church of the researcher are:

1. Established trust and camaraderie between the researcher and the participants, given the pastoral/parishioner relationship.
2. The convenience of access to the participants by the researcher, given the pastoral/parishioner relationship.

The cons of limiting the participants to members within the local church of the researcher are:

1. There is a limited number of members who can participate due to the small size of the congregation.
2. A potential unwillingness to participate among the members of the congregation due to familiarity within the pastor-parishioner relationship.

The ages of the participants will be 18 and up. The purpose of this age range is to circumvent any need to secure parental permission to involve any of the participants. The

participants will include both men and women because this research project is not targeting a specific gender. The church will be Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship in Monrovia, California, because this researcher is the pastor of this church and has identified the problem of biblical illiteracy within this congregation. The research method utilized within this thesis project will be the questionnaire/survey approach because it is the method this researcher believes is most conducive to the topic of this thesis.

Thesis Statement

If the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship develop a habit of weekly personal Bible reading, then they will improve their level of biblical literacy and also enhance their capacity to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). This means that they will be able to better discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error when it comes to biblical teaching. They will also be able to demonstrate a lifestyle that is in congruence with “the faith ... entrusted to the saints.”

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, the expansion of the literature reviewed for this project will be outlined through the display of several themes that emerged from the various authors presented. In addition to the outline of the literature review within this chapter, a theological foundation will be presented to support the need for addressing the problem. This section within the chapter will be replete with various examples that adequately undergird the position of the researcher in his undertaking of addressing the problem presented in this thesis project.

Lastly, in support of the outlined literature review and theological foundation, this chapter will present a theoretical foundation, in which various ways to remedy the problem will be outlined.

Literature Review

The review of the literature reveals the emergence of several themes that support the engagement of personal Bible reading. The themes observed emerging within the review of literature are: Application in response to Reading the Bible; Connecting with God through reading the Bible; Effectiveness in the World through Reading the Bible; Hindrances to Reading the Bible; Knowing God by Reading the Bible; and Spiritual Growth and Maturity from Reading the Bible.

Application in response to Reading the Bible

Mark L. Strauss possesses a similar view as Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in that he expresses how the goal of reading the Bible is not solely to exercise exegetical skills (although important), nor is it merely to demonstrate a breakdown of the cultural background of the Scriptures (which also is important). However, the goal of reading the Bible is to put into practice what Jesus called the first and second of the greatest commandment, as well as making godly decisions in life.³¹ Michael Reese echoes Strauss in that he stresses the importance of biblical literacy in order that one may “practice Christian discipleship.”³²

Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins and Thomas R. Schreiner approach application to Bible reading from a rather different but deeper perspective, in that there is a focus on the person of Jesus as the application of the Word or Logos in the flesh. Adding that followers of Christ essentially allow the Holy Spirit to rewrite their lives through continual teaching about God that leads to an application of Scriptures.³³

Judith Stack-Nelson, to a degree, echoes Mark Strauss’ position on the approach to Bible reading, in that she reaches past biblical literacy or knowing Scripture by simply reading it, but with the simple reading of the Bible, an understanding of how to read the Bible, which will ultimately lead to an application of the read text.³⁴ An article in *The Christian Century* brings the

³¹ Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times : Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 53, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³² Michael P. Reese, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge of Churches of Christ in West Virginia and Related Variables," Order No. 3445925, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F857079236%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

³³ Wayne Grudem, John C. Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Understanding Scripture : An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁴ Judith Stack-Nelson, 2014, "Beyond Biblical Literacy: Developing Readerly Readers in Teaching Biblical Studies," *Dialog*, 53 (4): 293–303. <https://search-ebshost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0002004036&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

joining of Bible reading and life application to a full circle by directing attention, not so much to reading the Bible to gain knowledge, but rather for the reader to apply the Bible he already knows. The article continues by showing that the reader should allow “the stories of faith” and the “movements of the spiritual life,” as seen and read in the Bible, to work on him.³⁵

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by demonstrating not only the importance of reading the Bible but an application of it, which ultimately brings a level of completion to the former. As one pursues a healthy level of biblical literacy, one should also keep in mind to apply what he learns, and so fulfill the call of the Lord Jesus to truly follow Him.

Connecting with God through Reading the Bible

As a part of spiritual formation, Klaus Issler addresses how the Bible is more than just a means whereby someone can study a recorded layout of history, but that engagement with it (the Bible) is communication and fellowship with God.³⁶

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun echoes Issler as he addresses the spiritual discipline of devotional Bible reading. Calhoun makes clear that devotional Bible reading is not limited to an exegetical exercise, but rather it is a show of companionship between the reader and the divine.³⁷

Christiane M. Lang Hearlson outlines five different models of biblical literacy, in which she addresses the various complaints against biblical illiteracy. In one of the five models, Hearlson outlines, “Biblical Literacy as Desire and Ability to Communicate,” she mentions how

³⁵ “A Faithful Imagination” *The Christian Century*, vol. 136, no. 8, 10 Apr. 2019, p. 7.. Gale In Context: Biography, accessed August 26, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A583380203/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=8c393646.

³⁶ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 140.

³⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 168.

biblical literacy provides an avenue for communication with God.³⁸ Like Hearlson, Tammy Jacko highlights the communicative aspect with God through biblical literacy by identifying the ultimate purpose of reading Scripture, which is to draw closer to God. ”³⁹

Tim Hutchings addresses the benefits of utilizing this current digital age, particularly apps, in helping people read the Bible. Hutchings, therefore, acknowledges that reading the Bible, reading it frequently, raises the expectation in the reader that God will speak to him through the text.⁴⁰

Tim Gorichanaz, in his study of Catholic’s experience with reading the Bible, discovered that the participants saw their engagement with the Bible as connecting with God.⁴¹ While John Piper addresses connection with God through reading the Bible, he highlights the results of this connection as it is seen through a demonstration of the exaltation of the worthiness and beauty of God by His people.⁴²

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by underlining how a discipline of reading the Bible not only serves as a means of increasing biblical literacy but, more importantly, serves as a means to connecting with God, which in turn gives credence to the necessary discipline of Bible reading.

³⁸ Christiane M. Lang Hearlson, *"Biblical Literacy as the Practice of Social Identity: A Practical Theological Engagement with New Literacy Studies."* Order No. 10141775, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1822497968?accountid=12085>.

³⁹ Tammy Janiece Jacko, *"Reading Scripture: Developing Intimacy with God, the Church, and Community"* (2019). Doctoral Dissertations and Projects. 2266.<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2266>.

⁴⁰ Tim Hutchings. 2017. "Design and the Digital Bible: Persuasive Technology and Religious Reading," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 32 (2): 205–19. doi:10.1080/13537903.2017.1298903.

⁴¹ Tim Gorichanaz. "Experiencing the Bible," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 15, no. 1–2 (2016): 19–31.

⁴² John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 136.

Effectiveness in the World through Reading the Bible

George Guthrie points to one of the purposes for reading the Bible as being seen in a believer, who through a life of reading the Bible, is able to make a difference in both the life of a fellow follower Christ, as well as one who is in need of hearing and receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴³

Todd Leach essentially echoes Guthrie by highlighting the necessity for Christians to possess fundamental knowledge and understanding of the Bible in order that they may share their faith with others in an effective way,⁴⁴ because unfortunately, as both Donald Daly and Adam Hearlson point out in their article on biblical literacy, that many Christians are biblically illiterate, in that, while they are able to quote passages of Scripture, they are many times unable to do so with the understanding of how those passages of Scripture fit within the overall context of the Bible.⁴⁵ John Longhurst gives a reminder that although Bible knowledge is important, the efficacy of Christian life is not summed up in just having a knowledge of the Bible.⁴⁶

Jeremy Weber writes how the Legislative Assembly in El Salvador issued a mandate that the Bible is to be read daily in the public schools, with the anticipation that doing so will curtail

⁴³ George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 5.

⁴⁴ Todd A. Leach, *Encouraging Word: The Pastor's Role in Increasing Biblical Literacy in the Local Congregation* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016) 8, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/ecommonsatsdissertations/812/>.

⁴⁵ Donald Daly and Adam Hearlson. "Biblical Literacy ..." *The Christian Century*, March 14, 2018, 6. Gale In Context: Biography (accessed August 22, 2020). https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A532076247/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=bd20503e.

⁴⁶ John Longhurst, "Thy Word I Haven't Hid in My Heart (but Should Have)." *Canadian Mennonite*, Oct 18, 2010. 4, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F762997806%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

violence among the students.⁴⁷ William Jeyne's research concurs with Weber in that Jeynes shows how (high levels of) Biblical literacy contribute to high levels of academic achievement and good behavior in school; whereas, lower levels of Biblical literacy contribute to lower levels of academic achievement and adverse behavior in school.⁴⁸ This observation by Jeynes could have a correlation with what Stephanie Martin points out in her article about 26 states that began to integrate the study of the Bible as literature into their public school curriculum, thus, to some degree, promoting a level of biblical literacy among the students.⁴⁹ However, Rob Boston, a liberal editor, expresses a different thought about the efficacy of integrating biblical literacy classes into the public school system. Boston believes that the “religious right” does not really want biblical literacy taught in public schools because to do so would mean the discrediting of “biblical literalists.”⁵⁰

In contrast to Rob Boston, Pradeep Emmanuel Stephen has similar results as Jeynes. After performing research on the relationship between biblical literacy and religious commitment among Christian High School juniors and seniors, Stephen found that students with a high level

⁴⁷ Jeremy Weber, 2010. “A Double-Edged Sword: Pastors Split over Bible Reading in Schools as Fix for Violence.” *Christianity Today*, 54 (11): 14, <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001810968&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁸ William H. Jeynes. 2009. “The Relationship between Biblical Literacy, Academic Achievement, and School Behavior among Christian- and Public-School Students.” *JRCE* 18 (1): 36–55, doi:10.1080/10656210902751826.

⁴⁹ Stephanie Martin, “Public Schools Teaching Biblical Literacy,” *Group*, Jan, 2007. 22, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F232019414%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

⁵⁰ Rob Boston, “Biblical Literacy' Is the Last Thing the Religious Right Wants to See in Public Schools.” *The Humanist*, March-April 2019, 34+. Gale In Context: Biography, accessed August 23, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A577396648/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=a0e84011.

of biblical literacy performed better academically than students with a lower level of biblical literacy.⁵¹

In the continuation of unveiling the efficacy Bible reading has on children and young in society, Ashlei N. Evans, in her study of secondary students and their perceptions of the influence Bible reading has on their academic success, found that girls (more than boys) believed that reading the Bible had a positive effect on their academic achievements, while from a mental-health perspective, Neal Krause and Kenneth Pargament point out how reading the Bible can assist in fostering good mental-health during stressful times.⁵² Phillip Hughes, also, in his discussion on the effect Bible reading has on young people, highlights how, when the Bible is engaged as being a key fount of faith, there will be an increase to the vibrancy of their personal faith.⁵³ In conjunction with this, Christopher Cobb cites J.S. Crawford in his suggestion that biblical literacy has a major role in the development of spiritual maturity in students.⁵⁴

A further look at biblical literacy in the sphere of education, Matthew Bryant cites the president of Union University David Dockery in his outline of what it takes to establish a place for higher Christian education (i.e., a college or university), and one of the components needed in

⁵¹ Pradeep Emmanuel Stephen. "The Relationship between Religious Commitment and Bible Literacy in Suburban New York and New Jersey Christian High School Juniors and Seniors." Order No. 10623777, Liberty University, 2017. In PROQUESTMS Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University; ProQuest Central; ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1964285950?accountid=12085>.

⁵² Neal Krause and Kenneth I Pargament. 2018. "Reading the Bible, Stressful Life Events, and Hope: Assessing an Overlooked Coping Resource." *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57 (4): 1428–39, doi:10.1007/s10943-018-0610-6.

⁵³ Philip J. Hughes. 2013. "Young People and Effective Bible Engagement." *St Mark's Review*, 224 (May): 94–100. <https://search-ebsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001960536&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵⁴ Christopher A. Cobb, "An Analysis of the Extent Christian Schools and their Bible Teachers Influence the Biblical Literacy of High School Students." Order No. 3581135, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1547351858%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

such an establishment is “a core curriculum including a heavy load of Biblical literacy and Christian thought courses.”⁵⁵ In conjunction with this, along with the rise of biblical literacy being introduced in public schools, William Jeynes makes a case for Christian colleges and universities to lead the way in training educators, who will teach the biblical literature courses in the public square versus abdicating to the public universities. This would more solidly ensure the correct teaching of the Bible as literature, thus increasing the chances of the students in the public schools of gaining a better level of biblical literacy.⁵⁶

Kate Shellnutt, just as Jeremy Weber, writes about the influence and effectiveness Bible reading has on the world, particularly those who frequent its pages. Shellnutt holds the position that those who acquaint themselves with the biblical text gain a deeper understanding of the Book and thereby are better postured to be effective in both evangelism and discipleship.⁵⁷

David Chalcraft expresses how readers of secular texts from sociologists, such as Max Weber and William Dubois, are able to understand the ideology of these men if the readers have a certain level of biblical literacy. The reason for the readers of these two sociologists to have a certain level of biblical literacy is because both Weber and Dubois reference the Bible frequently in their writings.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Matthew S. Bryant, “Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education.” *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 9, no. 1 (07, 2009): 57-9, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F231972626%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

⁵⁶ William H. Jeynes, (2012) “Christian Universities and Colleges: The Need to Train Instructors to Teach the Bible as Literature in Public Schools,” *Christian Higher Education*, 11:1, 4-14, DOI: 10.1080/15363759.2012.624441.

⁵⁷ Kate Shellnutt, “Black Bible Reading Endures: African Americans Outpace the Rest in Scripture Savvy. But Leaders Expect Even More.” *Christianity Today*, January-February 2019, 15+. Gale In Context: World History, accessed January 29, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A570199049/WHIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=WHIC&xid=d5c601be.

⁵⁸ David J. Chalcraft. 2011. “Biblical Literacy and Two Classical Sociologists,” *Postscripts*, 7 (2): 225–40.

Aaron Franzen, in contrast to the other authors mentioned, has a much different approach when it comes to the benefit of reading the Bible. Franzen takes the position that people who read the Bible frequently tend to become liberal in their views, particularly on matters of terrorism, justice, and science.⁵⁹ This is because those who are liberal tend to be more lenient when, for instance, it comes to punishment of the guilty. So, because the Bible expresses the importance of mercy and forgiveness, then those who read the Bible and observe the theme of mercy throughout its pages may also move toward a lenient approach to the guilty, thus lending to the notion that reading the Bible makes one more liberal.

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by underscoring the call of the believer to be salt and light in the world by endeavoring to be not only biblically knowledgeable but to be biblically effective. That is, to allow the biblical knowledge obtained (that comes through a reading of it) to be worked out in the life of a believer to the degree that she is effective in the world. This gives substance to biblical literacy.

Hindrances to Reading the Bible

Howard and William Hendricks give various strategies for reading the Bible in order to encourage people to read and study the Bible on a personal level regularly. In observing how many people read the Bible weekly on a personal basis, Hendricks cites a 2006 poll by the Barna Group showing 47 percent of Americans saying that they read the Bible sometime during the week,⁶⁰ while Bret Mavrigh cites a 2014 poll by the American Bible Society, powered by Barna

⁵⁹ Aaron B. Franzen, 2011, "A Left-Leaning Text: Survey Surprise: Frequent Bible Reading Can Turn You Liberal (in Some Ways)," *Christianity Today*, 55 (10): 32–33, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001858723&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶⁰ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 14.

Group, that 37 percent of Americans read their Bibles once or more per week.⁶¹ This is a 10 percent drop of just the people in America over a span of 8 years who read their Bibles every week. The decrease is most likely more if people in other countries were to be factored into this polling.

The decrease in Bible reading, as cited by both Hendricks and Mavrich, can, in part, be attributed to a hindrance that is common among well-meaning people. In his journal on biblical literacy, Mavrich identifies two hindrances people (Christians, specifically) encounter when reading the Bible, the first being: neglect in being deliberate to set aside time for Bible reading, and the second being: neglect in communing with God.⁶²

As for Hendricks, he identifies both a similar and different hindrance to that of Mavrich. In his “similar” perspective to that of Mavrich, Hendricks sees that people are hindered from reading the Bible when they convince themselves (or allow themselves to be convinced) that there is not enough time to actually read it. However, a hindrance that Hendricks points out that Mavrich does not is when people say they are not qualified or they are just a “layperson,” and therefore, cannot understand the Bible.⁶³

If 88 percent of Americans own a Bible, and 56 percent believe that the Bible is the word of God,⁶⁴ then why is there a decrease in weekly personal Bible reading among the same? When approaching this phenomenon of the decline in weekly Bible reading among Americans, and particularly Christians, one important factor that needs to be considered is what can be referred

⁶¹ Bret Mavrich, "The Word Made Fresh: As Bible Reading Falls and Biblical Illiteracy Rises, Innovators Are Finding Creative Ways to Get People to Engage with Scripture," *Leadership Journal*, Summer (2015): 41, accessed September 25, 2019, [https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/.](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 16, 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

to as the hindrance factor. What hinders Christians from developing and preserving a habitual practice of weekly Bible reading?

Aaron Baart discusses reasons as to why Christians do not engage in reading the Bible. One of the reasons Baart gives is that some Christians may have a wrong view of God. If Christians view God as harsh, distant, and untouchable, then this can serve as a hindrance to reading His words.⁶⁵ Baart also sheds light on the fact that some Christians may be afraid, not that the Bible is untrue, but that the Bible is true, which then demands the reader to respond in obedience.⁶⁶ The sober reality of this, as Baart points out, can result in a struggle of the reader's eagerness to engage in regular reading of the Bible.

D.A. Carson speaks in a similar way as Baart, in that he essentially believes it is man's own human depravity and individual faults that hinder real engagement in the Scriptures.⁶⁷ Carson goes on to expand on the scope of this hindrance for Christians by including what he calls "corporate or cultural problems,"⁶⁸ in that as the pressures of one's culture is against Christ, it can become more challenging to read the Scriptures.⁶⁹

R.C. Sproul, however, approaches the hindrance factor from another perspective. He addresses the fallacy of what some tend to believe about the Bible, that it is too difficult to understand and that only theologians and those with specific training in the Bible can handle the Scriptures.⁷⁰ Another hindrance to reading the Bible that Sproul mentions is that of seeing the

⁶⁵ Aaron Baart, "Why Christians Don't Read the Bible," *Digital Collections @ Dordt* (2015) https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/338.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 1138.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 15.

Bible as boring.⁷¹ However, Sproul sends a corrective message to everyone who holds these views about why they do not read the Bible. He says that the problem of not reading the Bible is not that it is too difficult to understand, nor is it because it is boring, but rather it is because people are lazy.⁷²

David Whitehead, on the other hand, does not see people as lazy and wants to engage the Bible but finds it too difficult to understand. However, he also sees them as possibly being intimidated by the Bible's size, which steers them from engaging in its reading.⁷³ This could be why one of the suggestions of Alice Camille in reading the Bible is not to be concerned about reading it in order from cover-to-cover, but perhaps approaching the narrative books first, while weaving in the more non-narrative books, such as the prophets and the epistles.⁷⁴

George H. Guthrie, along with Lindsay Olesberg and Ajith Fernando, gives another perspective to the hindrance factor for regular Bible reading. In surveying these authors, one will see that they do not differ too much, if at all, from Baart, Carson, and Sproul in their approach to the hindrance factor for reading the Bible. One will see that Guthrie, Olesberg, and Fernando approach the issue from a time and distraction perspective, in that they say the Bible is not being read daily because people are either too busy and too distracted both externally and internally.⁷⁵

⁷¹ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷³ David Whitehead, *Making Sense of the Bible: How to Connect with God Through His Word* (South Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers 2014), 10.

⁷⁴ Alice L. Camille. 2019, "Should You Read the Bible from Start to Finish?" *U.S. Catholic*, 84 (3): 49, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI0190330000060&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁷⁵ Lindsay Olesberg and Ajith Fernando, *The Bible Study Handbook : A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 71.

Alternatively, they are spread too thin due to their busy schedules.⁷⁶ This perspective from Guthrie, Olesberg, and Fernando corresponds somewhat to Carson's view that the pressures (distractions) from the culture can cause difficulty in regularly reading the Bible.

T.J. Wray approaches the hindrance factor from the perspective that says people neglect reading the Bible because they feel it is too puzzling.⁷⁷ And too complex, according to Stephen and Martin Westerholm.⁷⁸ That is why Bill Tammeus suggests the idea of studying the Bible within a group setting versus alone.⁷⁹

Gert Malan also addresses the complexity of the biblical text and the potential hindrance posed to would-be readers. Malan describes the complexity of the text as a "chasm," caused by the differences between the language, culture, and historical setting of the biblical text and the current readers.⁸⁰

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by highlighting the pervading issue of hindrances to reading the Bible so that this researcher can understand why the members of the congregation may find it difficult to read the Bible on a consistent basis. In spite of the fact that most people have a desire to read the Bible more often than they do, they are still falling short of developing and maintaining a habit of reading the Bible. As mentioned within the literature review, some of the hindrances entail busyness with

⁷⁶ George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 10.

⁷⁷ T. J. Wray, *What the Bible Really Tells Us: The Essential Guide to Biblical Literacy* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 11.

⁷⁸ Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture : Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 89.

⁷⁹ Bill Tammeus, "Biblical Literacy Through Group Study." *Presbyterian Outlook*, Sep 18, 2017.42, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1939740699%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

⁸⁰ Gert Malan. 2010. "Can the Chasms Be Bridged?: Different Approaches to Bible Reading." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 66 (1).

life, intimidation of the voluminous nature of the Bible, and ideology that the Bible is too difficult to understand.

Knowing God by Reading the Bible

A goal that everyone, especially Christians, should strive to attain is knowing God, of which Jan Johnson says that studying the Bible serves as the primary means to accomplish this noblest goal.⁸¹ This view is something Howard and William Hendricks hold to be true as well, in that they see knowing God as the main goal of studying the Bible.⁸²

Todd Leach echoes a similar perspective as Jan Johnson, Ajith Fernando, and Lindsay Olesberg by pointing out how the Bible serves as the principal means of both knowing and understanding the person of Jesus Christ.⁸³ In connection with this, Graham Stanton addresses the decline of biblical literacy among teenagers/young people, which consequently impedes their progress of knowing God. As a way of remedying this deficit of biblical literacy among young people, Stanton suggests that youth leaders refrain from explaining the Bible to young people, but rather, the youth leaders should allow young people the space to search out the Scriptures while providing oversight and guidance in that journey. This will lead the young people toward a greater understanding of the Bible and greater knowledge of the God thereof.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Jan Johnson, *Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 128.

⁸² Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 34.

⁸³ Todd A. Leach, *Encouraging word: the Pastor's role in increasing Biblical literacy in the local congregation* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016.<https://place.asburyseminary.edu/ecommonsatsdissertations/812/>), 6-7.

⁸⁴ Graham Stanton, "The Glory of Kings: Dialogical Practices of Bible Engagement with Teenagers in a Culture of Expressive Individualism," *St Mark's Review*, No. 240, Sep 2017: [34]-53. Availability: <<https://search-informit-com-au.ezproxy.liberty.edu/documentSummary;dn=082629985565579;res=IELHSS>> ISSN: 0036-3103.

In knowing God through discipleship, Bobby William Harrington and Josh Robert Patrick point out how the Bible reveals the magnitude of the person of Jesus Christ.⁸⁵ On knowing God and discipleship, Bill Tammeus expresses the importance of church congregants understanding that biblical literacy is vital to a life that is desiring to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.⁸⁶

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by featuring the relationship between the development of biblical literacy (that comes through a discipline of reading the Bible) to that of knowing God. The support found within this literature confirms to this researcher the importance of relaying to the congregation the benefit of engaging with the text of Scripture, a benefit that leads to knowing God more.

Spiritual Growth and Maturity from Reading the Bible

Theodore John Richard makes a direct connection to the spiritual well-being and ministerial achievements of Christians to that of the consistent use of Scripture in their lives.⁸⁷ Stephen and Martin Westerholm have a corresponding perspective as Theodore John Richard, in that they view the reading of Scripture as a way by which the believer's spirit is nourished and grows.⁸⁸ Westerholm goes even further by suggesting that it is spiritually beneficial to read the Bible, even if the reader does not understand what he/she is reading. They believe that there is

⁸⁵ Bobby William Harrington and Josh Robert Patrick, *The Disciple-Maker's Handbook : 7 Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 115.

⁸⁶ Bill Tammeus, "Theological Literacy is Vital to Faith--and Far Too Rare," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 2013, 4a, Gale In Context: Biography, accessed August 23, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A354444223/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=BIC&xid=8b929599.

⁸⁷ John Theodore Richard, "Equipping Members of Pendleton Street Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina to use the Bible in a Daily Time of Study and Prayer," Order No. 10118470, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016. In PROQUESTMS Religion Database, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1795076813?accountid=12085>.

⁸⁸ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 63.

power released in the reader's life while simply reading the Bible. Westerholm holds to the belief that the spiritual life of the reader (of the Bible) is nourished through reading the Bible, and yes, even if he/she does not understand what is being read.⁸⁹

Ted Olsen has much of the same approach to reading the Bible as Stephen and Martin Westerholm, in that he too believes there is nourishment to the Christian's spirit as he reads the Bible. However, Olsen takes it further in that he sees himself as the hungriest to read the Bible when he is in the act of reading the Bible.⁹⁰

Joel Beeke addresses an element of spiritual growth and maturity in the lives of both leaders and laypeople by how they approach the Bible. As both leaders and laypeople read the Bible with the intent of listening to and learning from God, Beeke alludes to how it makes room for a further understanding of God and His ways, which yields a certain level of spiritual growth and maturity.⁹¹

I.C. Hines, like Joel Beeke, sees how one can increase in spiritual maturity through the practice of reading the Scripture and biblical literacy. As Hines further points out, this growth in spiritual maturity through possession of biblical literacy is a virtue that clergy and religious groups seek out for their parishioners and others.⁹²

⁸⁹ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 63.

⁹⁰ Ted Olsen. "Just Jump Back in: Christian Leaders Have Their Own Reasons for Not Reading the Bible," *Christianity Today*, March 2019, 27+. Gale In Context: World History, accessed January 29, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A577397075/WHIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=WHIC&xid=25144bee.

⁹¹ Joel R. Beeke, "A Life in the Word," *Puritan Reformed*, Journal 8, no. 1 (January 2016): 179–202, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI9KZ190330000892&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹² I.C. Hine, Nicky Hallett, Carl Tighe, and José Luis Lopez Calle, 2011, "Practicing Biblical Literacy: Case Studies from the Sheffield Conference," *Postscripts*, 7 (2): 173–96. doi:10.1558/post.v7.2.173.

Bob Bolender implements Joel Beeke's listening and learning approach to reading the Bible by encouraging his congregation to engage in a daily reading of the Bible, to which he would, in turn, "teach scriptural surveys that covered the passages they were reading."⁹³ This resulted in the congregation reading through the Bible in one year, which produced a level of spiritual growth and maturity in their lives.

Similar to the daily Bible reading approach of Bolender, Jocelyn Hill highlights the spiritual benefit that some members of a church had while participating in a Bible reading plan. She underscores how, although the church members found that they benefited greatly from reading the Bible with other members within the congregation, they also found it beneficial in practicing an individual daily reading of the Bible.⁹⁴

Beverly Vos, in writing on spiritual disciplines, names the discipline of Bible study as a means of spiritual growth, in which she highlights the practice of Scripture memorization to facilitate a renewed mind and a transformed life.⁹⁵

Similar to that of Beverly Vos and her perspective on the influence of a regular diet of Bible Study on the spiritual growth of the reader, Ruth Powell and John Bellamy connect an

⁹³ Bob Bolender. "A New Road to Biblical Literacy." *Leadership Journal*, Spring 2004, 40. Gale Academic Onefile, accessed January 29, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A116346751/AONE?u=vic_liberty&sid=AONE&xid=5307e276.

⁹⁴ Jocelyn Hill, "Biblical Literacy: Is it Possible?" *The Clergy Journal*, 78, no. 1 (10, 2001): 19, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/230517061?accountid=12085>.

⁹⁵ Beverly Vos, 2012, "The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 36 (2): 100–114, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001891054&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

enjoyment of frequent voluntary Bible reading to that of an increase in Bible knowledge, in addition to a more positive influence in thoughts and behavior.⁹⁶

Daniel M. Doriani encourages believers to grow and develop in the ability to discern truth from error by promoting a habit of studying the Bible, with the intent of adhering to its direction without reading one's own presuppositions into it.⁹⁷

Ryan D. Harker also writes of the spiritual growth that takes place in the life of the Christian when he or she is reading the Bible with a pliable heart that is able to be formed and fashioned to the end that their view of the world is in congruence with the perspective given through the lens of the very pages of the Bible being read. This is all in spite of living in a culture dominated by technology, which vies for the Christian's attention over that of the Bible.⁹⁸ In connection with Harker, Robin Henson mentions how transformation cannot take place in the life of a Christian apart from engaging and studying the Scriptures.⁹⁹

Aaron B. Franzen also alludes to spiritual growth through reading the Bible by pointing out how, when one frequently reads the Bible, their moral worldview has a greater chance of

⁹⁶ Amanda Ruth Powell and John Bellamy, 2017, "Bible-Reading Patterns among Australian Church Attenders: Twenty Years of Survey Results (1991-2011)," *St Mark's Review*, 240 (July): 54–75, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIKU0171211000266&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁷ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 155.

⁹⁸ Ryan D. Harker, 2015, "Reading the Bible in a Technopoly," *Vision*, (Winnipeg, Man.) 16 (2): 52–59, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIKEV160530001621&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁹ Robin K. Henson, "Fostering Self-efficacy for Biblical Learning and Doctrinal Awareness with Micro-teaching in a Brief Course on Bible Study," (Doctoral Dissertations and Projects. 2322) <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2322>.

becoming more “orthodox.”¹⁰⁰ At the same time, Marek P. Zabriskie goes as far as to suggest that engaging with the Bible is the most successful means of spiritual growth.¹⁰¹

Similar to both Franzen and Zabriskie, Joseph G. Austin takes the position that biblical literacy is actually a central piece in having significant spiritual growth and discipleship.¹⁰² And Mark Maddix believes that a formative work by the Spirit of God takes place in the life of a believer, who engages in the reading of Scripture.¹⁰³ Carol Cauble holds the same sentiment as the authors mentioned above, in that if a person desires to grow spiritually, they must possess a healthy level of biblical literacy.¹⁰⁴

Wesley Hill has a somewhat different approach when it comes to spiritual growth from daily reading the Bible. Hill sees personal Bible reading only as effective as one’s regular attendance to a church to hear the public reading (and explanation) of the Bible. Therefore, Hill sees personal Bible reading as an extension of public Bible hearing.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Aaron B. Franzen, 2013, “Reading the Bible in America: The Moral and Political Attitude Effect,” *Review of Religious Research*, 55 (3): 393–411.

¹⁰¹ Marek P. Zabriskie, 2015, “The Bible Challenge and Why It Matters,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 97 (4): 647–55, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3824013&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁰² Joseph G. Austin, “The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church,” Order No. 27663599, Liberty University, 2019. In PROQUESTMS Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2320985258?accountid=12085>.

¹⁰³ Mark A. Maddix, “Rediscovering the Formative Power of Scripture Reading for the Church,” *Christian Education Journal*, 15, no. 1 (04, 2018): 34–42, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2082096779%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹⁰⁴ Carol (C. J.) Cauble, “An Assessment of Biblical Literacy of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and Related Variables.” Order No. 27664483, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2322186132%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹⁰⁵ Wesley Hill, 2014, “Why Personal Devotions Aren’t Enough: The Bible Was Made to Be Read in Church First,” *Christianity Today*, 58 (10): 30. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3766623&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Samuel Son takes Hill's approach to read the Bible and its influence on spiritual growth further by suggesting that a reading of the Bible out loud is a better way to more fully gaining a healthy level of biblical literacy. Son supports his position by referencing the methodology of oral tradition, which was commonly used in ancient (biblical) times when it came to learning and understanding what was written on parchment; this includes the letters of the apostles that were written and circulated to the churches to be read aloud to the congregations.¹⁰⁶

Tim Chester echoes the spirit of the previous authors by making clear the spiritual benefit he receives from [regularly] reading the Bible, which should speak to every believer in Christ Jesus. Chester essentially expresses his need to read the Bible, not out of trying to impress God or people, but rather from a place of knowing that without a consistent diet of the word, his life (and any believer's life) would cease to thrive spiritually.¹⁰⁷ In a similar perspective as that of Chester, Robert Page says that a lessening in biblical literacy is a lessening in the development of spiritual maturity.¹⁰⁸

The literature reviewed within this theme supports the purpose of this project by emphasizing the connection between a steady diet of reading the Bible to that of spiritual growth. One author within the reviewed literature expresses how that even if one does not understand what she is reading (in the Bible) spiritual growth is still taking place. Although this notion does not necessarily coincide with the purpose of this project, as this thesis promotes reading the Bible

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Son, "Hearing the Bible," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Sep 18, 2017. 43, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1939737012%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹⁰⁷ Tim Chester, *Bible Matters : Making Sense of Scripture* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Robert W. Page, "Increasing the Biblical Literacy of the Members of Sharon Baptist Church, Charlotte, North Carolina through Expository Preaching," Order No. 10680740, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1972129011%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

to understand it; there is still agreement that a continual engagement with the text of Scripture can allow space for the Spirit of God to perform spiritual work in the life of the reader.

Summary

Several themes emerge within the review of literature that supports the importance of biblical literacy, coupled with the discipline of reading the Bible. These themes: Application in response to Reading the Bible; Connecting with God through Reading the Bible; Effectiveness in the World through Reading the Bible; Hindrances to Reading the Bible; Knowing God by Reading the Bible; and Spiritual Growth and Maturity from Reading the Bible, all contribute to understanding the importance regular Bible reading has on one possessing a healthy level of biblical literacy.

Theological Foundations

The following words are recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Moses says the words to the people of Israel as they are approaching the end of a long and trying journey through the wilderness to the Promise Land. This point of the journey would also mark the imminent end of Moses' life on this earth. So, as the end of two great journeys prepare to come to an end, there is also the anticipation of commencement into the next, and particularly for the people of Israel into the long-awaited Promise Land, the land of Canaan. In preparing the Israelites to enter the land that God long ago promised to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), Moses reiterates to them the importance of keeping the words and commandments of

God, “ ... so that your days may be long ...,” and “ ... so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.”¹⁰⁹ Moses further makes the appeal to the Israelites to keep the words and commandments of God by reminding them who the LORD is and that He is deserving of their complete allegiance and obedience. It is from there that Moses further reiterates to the people the gravity of keeping the words of God, but not only for themselves but for the sake of their children. He also instructs them to keep it in a way that would be visible on their persons, on their homes, and on their cities.

Within the afore-referenced passage of Scripture, there is a central teaching when it comes to the word of God, which is: the word of God is to always be on the minds and hearts of the people of God to the extent they, in turn, teach it to their children, live it out in their homes, and exemplify it in their communities. Therefore, this central teaching calls for the people of God, post revelation of Jesus Christ, to exercise in principle what the people of God, pre revelation of Jesus Christ, exercised in literatim. So, whereas the people who were directly addressed at the time of Deuteronomy 6, and that pre revelation of Christ, may have literally bound the commandments of God on themselves and wrote them on their homes and gates; however, now post revelation of Christ, the people of God do so, but in principle or spirit, versus literal or by the letter. By approaching the text this way, the word of God can truly be kept and followed from the heart or an inside-out position versus an outside-in position. However, how can this divine directive be carried out from the heart unless there is first knowledge of the word of God, which for the purposes of this thesis project, is obtained through a personal regular weekly reading of the Bible.

¹⁰⁹ Deuteronomy 6:2- 3.

Katie Edwards defines biblical literacy as: “Knowing the Bible; Being familiar with popular Bible characters; Being able to recognize common biblical phrases; and Being able to connect the knowledge to references in literature.”¹¹⁰ Thus, biblical literacy is essentially having a basic knowledge of the Bible, along with having the understanding of how to connect it, in a basic way, to other passages within the Bible, with the result of applying it to life. Kimberly Secrist Ashby is right in saying, “Biblical literacy is something we all need in our lives and in our congregations.”¹¹¹

The Bible is replete in both the Old and New Testaments with examples of different people who demonstrated a healthy level of biblical literacy, in that they possessed a basic (and even advanced) knowledge of the word of God, along with an understanding of its application for both their lives and the lives of others.

Old Testament Examples

The Law

In Deuteronomy¹¹² 8:3b, Moses says to the Israelites as they are in the wilderness, “ ... in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” In this passage, Moses recounts to the Israelites how God sustained them with food while they were in the wilderness for forty years. At the same time,

¹¹⁰ Katie Edwards, *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹¹ Kimberly Secrist Ashby, "Learning the Bible Together: A Presbytery Experiment in Biblical Literacy," *Presbyterian Outlook*, Sep 18, 2017, 26.
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1939740764%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹¹² Deuteronomy, which means “second law,” is a reiteration of the Law or Word of God. Deuteronomy (along with the other first four books of the Old Testament) served as the “book of the law,” as mentioned in Joshua 1:8.

Moses is reminding the people of God that it was not just physical food that they ate to live, but it was also spiritual food that kept them alive; and that spiritual food was the word of God. So, as the Israelites prepared to cross over into the Promise Land, they were to remember that if they wanted to live securely and peacefully in the land. They not only need the material things of life, but they also need the spiritual things of life, which are found in the word of God. Therefore, interacting with the Bible through regular reading assists one greatly in knowing the ways of God in order to practice them and live securely in life.

The Prophets

In 2 Kings 22, King Josiah, eighteen years after he had assumed the throne of Judah, sent his officials to the “house of the LORD,” to the high priest, Hilkiah, to ensure that the money given for the temple repairs was being utilized accordingly and repairs were moving forward. Upon the officials of the king arriving at the temple and speaking with the high priest, Hilkiah, he (Hilkiah) informed them that he “found the book of the law in the house of the LORD” (v. 9). No doubt, this was the Torah (the Law), and specifically the book of Deuteronomy. The officials brought the book back to the king and “read it aloud to the king” (v. 10). Upon hearing the words within the book, the king “tore his clothes” (v. 11) in repentance to the LORD because the king said, “... great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (v. 13). The king then sent his officials to “the prophetess Huldah,” who, in turn, sent the word of the LORD through his officials to the king, informing him that the wrath of the LORD would come upon the people of Judah for their sins. However, because King Josiah humbled himself and repented, he would go to his grave in peace and would not see the wrath of the LORD come upon the people of Judah. King Josiah became biblically literate to the extent that, “Before him there was

no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kings 23:25).

King Josiah had a heart towards God and therefore wanted to know God and His ways. His knowledge of God and repentance of heart was brought about by the word of God being read aloud to him. It was through his biblical literacy that he became an unprecedented king in Judah.

The Writings

The scribe Ezra was biblically literate because the Bible characterizes him as being a man who was “... skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given ...” (Ezra 7:6). He is also said to have “set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

Ezra had a pure zeal for God and His ways. This zeal of Ezra was demonstrated in his posture toward the word of God, in that he had a discipline of regularly studying the word of God, and he not only studied it, but he also practiced and taught it. Ezra displayed a life that was biblically literate through a regular discipline of reading the Scriptures.

The Psalmist expresses his biblical literacy in the longest “chapter” of the Bible, Psalm 119. A few familiar passages wherein the Psalmist demonstrates his biblical literacy are: “I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you” (v. 11). In this verse, the Psalmist is expressing the effect that his interaction with the word of God has on his ability to keep from sinning against God. “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my mediation” (v. 99); in this verse, the Psalmist acknowledges that his capacity to understand matters (possibly of life in general, as it is unspecified) is attributed to his meditation or giving of his attention to the word of God. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (v. 105); here, the Psalmist continues to acknowledge the efficacy of the word of God in

his life. He expresses how the word of God guides his way through life, with the implication that this is true because he has a life of interacting with the word of God. “You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word” (v. 114); in this verse, the Psalmist explicitly attributes his ability to find shelter (spiritually and possibly physically) in God through his consistent hope in the word of God, which also implies that he is consistently engaging the word of God. “My soul keeps your decrees; I love them exceedingly” (v. 167). In this verse, the Psalmist unashamedly acknowledges his love for the word of God, which consequently brings his soul or life to keep the word of God. This is undoubtedly the expression of one who has a healthy level of knowledge and understanding of the word of God, which comes through a regular hearing and reading of the word of God.

In the above passages of Scripture, the Psalmist expresses his love for God by expressing devotion to His word; and this devotion to God’s word brings the Psalmist to regular interaction with it, to the end that his life is changed.

New Testament Examples

The Gospels and Jesus

In Matthew 1:1-17, the Gospel writer demonstrates his biblical literacy when he explains the birth of Jesus the Messiah by way of outlining the generations from Abraham to David, from David to the exile into Babylon, and from Babylon to the birth of Jesus. Although the Gospel writer does not cite any particular passages of Scripture when outlining the genealogy of Jesus, it should be known that he was aware of such passages and the significance of each person and event mentioned in the line-up. The following are the biblical accounts the Gospel writer is referring to when he names Abraham, David, the exile into Babylon, and Babylon to the birth of Jesus:

1. **Abraham.** In Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord calls Abraham (Abram) out from his “father’s house” to go to the land that He would show him. The Lord then tells Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The Gospel writer understood that Abraham was the progenitor of the Hebrew people, from whom Jesus, the Messiah, would descend, who would fulfill the promise that “... all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
2. **David.** In II Samuel 7:12-13, the Lord makes a covenant with King David saying, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Although this promise made to David regarding his descendant would be carried through David’s son, Solomon, it had an ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, the Messiah, who is a descendant of David, and whose throne of the kingdom is forever. The Gospel writer understood this eternal truth.
3. **Babylonian Exile.** In II Chronicles 36:17-21, the account of the captivity of the land of Judah by the Babylonians is recorded. In verse 17, the writer makes it known that it was the Lord who sent “the king of the Chaldeans” to conquer Judah; however, verse 15 informs the reader that before this happened, the Lord “sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place ...” However, verse 16 says, “but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at this prophets, until the wrath of the LORD against his people became so great that there was no remedy.” As a result, the house

of God was burned down and the wall of Jerusalem was broken down. The people of Judah were exiled into Babylon, thus marking the beginning of what they would experience from that time on up to the coming of the Messiah; captivity. This was a major adverse shift in the history of the people of God; thus, the Gospel writer places it as an event leading up to the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

4. **Babylonian Exile to the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.** Again in II Chronicles 36:17-21, the captivity of Judah by the Babylonians is recorded, and as previously mentioned, it marks a major shift in the lives of the descendants of Abraham. So, from the time of the Babylonian exile to the birth of the Messiah, the Jews had been waiting for the time wherein they would be free from what had been a perpetual cycle of captivity that began with Babylon. The Gospel writer understood this anticipation of the deliverance of the Jews from their oppressors, a deliverance that would come through their Messiah, who would come from their forefather, Abraham, and their model king, David. This Messiah is Jesus.

The Gospel writer also demonstrates his biblical literacy by his frequent usage of the phrase, “to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet,” which is found in 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:15-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; and 27:9-10. In Luke 3:23-38, the Gospel writer demonstrates his biblical literacy when he, too, outlines the genealogy of Jesus, although, through the line of Adam. The passages above confirm the faithfulness of God to His word, in which he specifically spoke to the serpent (Satan) in Genesis 3:15 of the “seed of the woman” who would “strike” the head of the serpent, and the serpent would “strike his heel.”¹¹³ The promise of “the seed” in Genesis 3:15 was preserved through the calling of Abraham, who was promised by God that

¹¹³ Known as the protoevangelium or “first” (proto) “gospel” (evangelium).

through him (Abraham), “all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).” The promised seed continued through the generations to King David, whom God promised that he would establish the kingdom of his son, who would come after him (2 Samuel 7:12). All of these aforesaid promises that God spoke from Genesis 3:15 onward were fulfilled in the coming of His Son, Jesus, who is the Christ. The gospel writers, as seen in Matthew and Luke, knew these things within the Scriptures (the TaNaK¹¹⁴) because of their apparent frequent interaction and study of them, thus providing them with a healthy level of biblical literacy.

The Gospel writer in Mark 1:1-3 demonstrates his biblical literacy when he introduces the “good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” by quoting from both the prophet Malachi (3:1) and the prophet Isaiah (40:3). Similar to the Matthean account, the Marcan account carries a “fulfillment” motif, showing the faithfulness of God to His word.

The Gospel writer in John 1:1 demonstrates his biblical literacy in his opening prologue when he says, “In the beginning was the Word ... ” In this opening prologue, the Gospel writer is clearly referencing Genesis 1:1 to explain the eternal existence of the Word, who “became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14).

In Matthew 3:15, Jesus responds to John the Baptist’s attempt to prevent him from baptizing Jesus by saying, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Also, in Matthew 4:1–11, Jesus is in the wilderness responding to the devil’s temptations with the phrase, “It is written.” In Matthew 12:1-8, when the disciples were plucking and eating heads of grain as they were going through the grainfields on the sabbath, and the Pharisees saw it and questioned Jesus about it, He responded to them with the phrase, “Have you

¹¹⁴ TaNaK is how the Jews refer to the “Old Testament;” T is for Torah (Law), N is for Nebiim (Prophets), K is for Kethubim (Writings).

not read ...” Furthermore, in Matthew 12:40-42, Jesus references the prophet Jonah, the queen of the South, and Solomon in response to the scribes and Pharisees asking Him for a sign.

In Mark 4:12, after being approached by His disciples and others to explain the parable of the sower, just before He began to explain the parable, He explained why the general crowd was unable to understand the parable, which, He explained, was to fulfill what is written in Isaiah 6:9-10. In Mark 7:6-7, Jesus also quoted from Isaiah 29:13 when He was addressing the Pharisees and scribes in their tradition of men in the matter of “... eating with defiled hands ...” (Mark 7:2).

In Luke 4:18-19, as Jesus is in the synagogue on the sabbath and stands to read, “He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...’” He was reading from Isaiah 61:1-2. Also, in Luke 19:46, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7 to explain why He “began to drive out those who were selling things” in the temple.

In John 8:58, Jesus, in His argument with the (unbelieving) Jews as to who He is, He concludes by saying, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” This claim of Jesus as “I am” is a clear reference to Exodus 3:14, wherein God revealed Himself to Moses as, “I AM WHO I AM.”

Acts of the Apostles

The apostles are also seen possessing a healthy level of biblical literacy that demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. In the book of Acts, as the apostles (and others) were in Jerusalem waiting for “the promise of the Father,” they engaged in the process of selecting a replacement of the apostleship of Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus and afterward hung himself. During this selection process, “... Peter stood up among the believers ...” and explained how the Holy Spirit, through David, foretold the betrayal of Judas. Peter then

demonstrated his biblical literacy by saying, “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer’” (Acts 1:20). Peter’s reciting of the Psalmist demonstrates not only his apt level of biblical knowledge but also that of his audience, in that they (along with Peter), would understand how the passage in Psalms found fulfillment in the replacement of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of the Lord Jesus.

Also, in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, and all who were in the upper room, and they began to speak in other tongues, which resulted in the residents of Jerusalem thinking that they were drunk with “new wine.” Peter stood and addressed the residents of Jerusalem, saying, “these are not drunk, as you suppose ... No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel ... ” Peter began to quote Joel 2:28-32. He demonstrated his biblical literacy while also explaining what was happening with the disciples, an explanation from Scripture that is somewhat familiar to the hearers in Jerusalem.

Again, in Acts 2:25-35, Peter explained that Jesus is the resurrected Messiah, the One whom David foretold as being raised from dead, by quoting Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110:1. Also, in Acts 4:11, Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, as Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders ... has become the cornerstone.” This was in response to the “rulers, elders, and scribes,” who were questioning Peter and John as to “what power or by what name” they made the man who was “lame from birth” (Acts 3:2) able to walk; a passage of Scripture that the religious leaders would have been familiar with as well. Furthermore, after the Jewish leaders threatened the apostles and ordered them “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18), they released them. Upon releasing them, the apostles went to their fellow believers and

prayed, quoting Psalm 2:1-2, once again demonstrating their knowledge and application of the Scriptures.

Lastly, in Acts 13, the apostle Paul and his companions are in the synagogue in “Antioch in Pisidia,” when they began to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews. In their proclamation, they quote from Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:34), Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:35), and Habakkuk 1:5 (Acts 13:41), demonstrating both their knowledge of the Scriptures and their ability to exegete the Scriptures in showing their fulfillment in Christ.

The Epistles

In Romans 3:4, the apostle Paul, in his address to the Jews about the “faithlessness” of some, and whether that would “nullify the faithfulness of God,” Paul makes an exclamation, “By no means!” Then he quotes from Psalm 51:4 to support what he just exclaimed in showing how the Psalmist testifies to the infallible and complete righteousness of God’s decisions, in spite of what mankind might do. As David Peterson et al. say, “Here God is justified or ‘proved to be right’ in his ‘words.’”¹¹⁵ Paul continues in Romans 3:10-18 when he quotes from Psalm 53:3, 14:1-3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7, as well as Isaiah 59:7-8 to explain how everyone has “turned aside, together” and “have become worthless ... ”

In I Corinthians 1:19, the apostle Paul “emphasizes God’s sovereignty, and, with a quote from Isaiah 29:14, stresses that God rejects the wisdom of the world” through the proclamation of the preaching about the cross that is “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18).¹¹⁶ In quoting the passage from Isaiah

¹¹⁵ David Peterson, Andreas J. Köstenberger, T. Desmond Alexander, and Thomas R. Schreiner. *Commentary on Romans*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2017), 172, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1561241&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹¹⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner. *I Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 66.

29:14 to support his message to the Corinthian church about trusting in the power of the cross of Christ, Paul not only demonstrates his high level of biblical literacy but also revealed that the Corinthian church possessed some level of knowledge about the Isaiah 29:14 passage as well.

In 2 Corinthians 6:2, the apostle Paul, in order to “bolster his appeal...echoes Isaiah 49:8 ...”¹¹⁷ to support his plea to the Corinthian church “not to accept the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor 6:1). Here, Paul again quotes from the prophetic voice of Isaiah, son of Amoz, who, in the afore quoted passage of Isaiah 49:8, declares the inherent favor that is within the salvific act of God toward His people. Paul sees this favor, which is expressed in the salvific act of God, transcending the ages between covenants to his present audience. For the Corinthian church to have this knowledge and understanding of the favor of God, through knowledge and understanding of the Scripture, would strengthen their ability to do as Paul is exhorting them to do, which is, “not to accept the grace of God in vain.”

In Galatians 3:10, the apostle Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 in his urging the Galatian church to not “... rely on the works of the law ...” (Gal 3:10), because, according to Deuteronomy 27:26, “Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.” Paul demonstrates his biblical literacy in referencing Deuteronomy 27:26 to support his faith versus works/law argument that gives his audience the fortitude needed to combat the opposing voices attempting to lure them back into the bondage from which Christ delivered them. As Craig Keener says concerning Paul’s perspective of faith versus works/law, “Works of law cannot justify, nor were they meant to; what matters for being put right with God is Christ - faith.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Raymond F. Collins. *Second Corinthians (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 128.

¹¹⁸ Craig S. Keener. *Galatians: A Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 247.

In Ephesians 5:25, the apostle Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives “ ... just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... ” Paul solidifies his exhortation to husbands when he “cites Genesis 2:24 to drive home the point of being one flesh: ‘For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’”¹¹⁹ The fact that Paul uses Scripture to support his exhortation to husbands in their relationship with their wives not only demonstrates his apt level of biblical literacy but also shows that the church in Ephesus possessed a measurable level of biblical literacy in that they were familiar with the Genesis passage. This conclusion could be drawn from the observation that Paul was able to seamlessly weave the Genesis passage in his letter without using the frequently seen elsewhere preface of, “It is written.”

In Philippians 2:11, the apostle Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23 to show the fulfillment of the exaltation of Christ as Lord “to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). Paul’s usage of the Isaiah passage as confirmation to the Lordship of Jesus and “the unique greatness of Israel’s God.”¹²⁰ emboldens the Philippian church to confess the same amid a culture that was against such a proclamation of anyone besides the Roman emperor. So, Paul’s knowledge of the Scriptures, as it is shared with the Philippian church, equipped the church in her ability to stand firm in the faith of Christ amid an anti-Christ culture.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the apostle Paul directly references Daniel 11:36 regarding the rise of the antichrist. Paul is speaking to the church of Thessalonica about “ ... the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him ... ”(2 Thess. 2:1) and the church not being “ ... quickly shaken in mind or alarmed ... to the effect that the day of the Lord is already

¹¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock. *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 183..

¹²⁰ Ralph P. Martin. *Philippians*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 114.

here” (2 Thess. 2:2). Paul then begins to give the criteria that must first occur before the Lord returns, one being the revealing of the anti-christ or “the man of sin.” This is where Paul references the passage of Scripture in Daniel 11:36 to support his argument. Paul’s knowledge of the Scriptures allowed him to bring comfort to the church during a time in which they were afraid and confused about the return of the Lord as if they had missed it. Paul’s apt level of biblical literacy afforded the church also to have an additional level of biblical literacy so that they, too, could discern the truth from error.

In 1 Timothy 5:18, the apostle Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 to charge that “ ... the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor ... ” (1 Tim 5:17). In this context, Paul is continuing his instruction to Timothy about church order and “how one ought to behave in the household of God ... ” (1 Tim 3:15). Then as a matter of order, when it comes to “elders who rule well ... ” (1 Tim 3:17), they are to “be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching ... ” (1 Tim 3:17). Paul is ensuring that these elders are financially compensated for their work in the Lord, and he supports his instruction of the matter by quoting Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain ... ” (Deuteronomy 25:4). As Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele say, [Paul] “appeals to Scripture’s lesser claim— in this case about farm animals— to prove Scripture’s ultimate claim— in this case about the wages of a laborer for the gospel: if we generally treat beasts of burden fairly, then how much more should we treat fairly those among us who labor on God’s behalf.”¹²¹ Paul’s sharing of his knowledge and understanding of the Scripture with Timothy

¹²¹ Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele. *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2012), 114.

served to assist Timothy in warding off any potential abuse and misuse of elders serving in the church.

In Hebrews 1:5, the author quotes Psalm 2:7 to explain the superiority of Christ over angels. As Thomas Schreiner says, “Jesus is greater than the angels because the OT Scriptures designate him as God’s Son, which is a title not given to angels. Angels are designated as “sons” but are never identified as God’s Son.¹²² The writer addressing the superiority of Christ over angels to his audience reaffirms to the church the reason their faith needs to remain in Christ as the means of being right with God. Therefore, the writer’s high level of biblical literacy allowed him to equip his audience with the Scriptural understanding needed to continue with their faith in Christ, despite the threat and pull from the culture to do otherwise.

In James 4:6, the author quotes from Proverbs 3:34 to show how “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34). James is admonishing the church as it pertains to the “conflicts and disputes among” (James 4:1) themselves, which James says have their source from the “cravings that are at war within you” (James 4:1). From this, James continues to, in essence, deliver a rebuke to his audience for their selfish ways, at which time he also warns them about being friends with the world “is enmity with God” (James 4:4). This then leads James to reveal from Scripture (Exodus 20:5) how “God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us” (James 4:5); and then to further reference Scripture (Proverbs 3:34) as it relates to how God deals with the proud and the humble. So, from this, James exhorts his audience to “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James’ skillful usage and knowledge of the Scriptures gave him the wherewithal to instruct his

¹²² Thomas R. Schreiner. *Commentary on Hebrews*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 64.

audience, and thereby equip them to dismiss those things that would displease God and to embrace the grace instead.

In 1 Peter 1:24-25, the apostle Peter quotes from Isaiah 40:6-8 to explain the power of the “enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). Peter is addressing the people of God, whom he characterized at the beginning of his letter as “exiles of the Dispersion.” This type of description Peter utilizes is normally “used in the OT for Jews living outside Palestine, the true home of the chosen people.”¹²³ However, in this context, he uses it to refer to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, who have been “scattered among Pagans and perhaps also in the sense of being away from their heavenly home.”¹²⁴ In addition to the aforesaid, when Peter uses the word “exiles” to describe his audience; this seems to allude to the post-captivity of the people of God, as depicted in the Old Testament, and with a post-captivity, there is the acknowledgment that there was captivity and a release that followed. As Peter is quoting Isaiah 40:6-8 when describing how his audience had been “born anew, not of perishable but imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23), he is connecting the release and deliverance of the people of God from captivity with the imperishability of the word of God, as seen in Isaiah 40, to the deliverance of the people of God (whom he is writing to) from sin, through the same imperishable and enduring word of God. Peter’s biblical knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures remind his audience of the power of the word of God and the importance of knowing it.

In 2 Peter 2:22, the apostle Peter quotes from Proverbs 26:11 to explain the gravity of one who turns away from righteousness back to a life of sin. Peter shows how one who has “ ...

¹²³ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 708.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:20), if they are to become ensnared again in the sin that they had escaped, “the last state has become worse for them than the first” (1 Pet 2:20), thus fulfilling Proverbs 26:11. The fact that Peter quotes this proverb from the Scriptures to support his admonishment to the church about steering away from false prophets and teachers, he is demonstrating his apt biblical literacy, as well as supplying his audience with spiritual ammunition of knowledge of the word of God to fight against and resist the seducing doctrine of the false prophets and teachers, who will be among them (1 Pet 1:1).

In 1 John 3:12, the apostle John references Genesis 4:8 when he speaks of Cain, who “murdered his brother,” and that his ways should be avoided. In this context, John admonishes the church to “love one another” (1 John 3:11), which directly contrasts how Cain related to his brother Abel. John continues in his admonishment to love one another by stating the result of doing such, which is, “ ... we have passed from death to life ... ” (1 John 3:14). As John admonished the church to avoid being like Cain by loving another, he was able to equip his audience with the same knowledge of the Bible that he possessed so that they too could be aware of the dangers in allowing hatred to stir in their hearts against a brother or sister in the Lord.

In Jude, the writer references Genesis 19 when he speaks of “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities” (Jude 7) as examples of objects of judgment because of their wickedness. As Jude writes to his audience to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints,” he gives examples of those who did not contend for the faith but instead rejected it. In using Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of those who rejected faith in God, as seen in their deeds, he warns the church “ ... that those who reject Christ through unbelief and disobedience

will experience the eternal judgment and punishment of God.”¹²⁵ The use of the Scripture by Jude for the sake of warning and exhorting his audience to contend for the faith was an equipping of the church to implement that most noble assignment.

Apocalyptic

In Revelation 1:7, the apostle John quotes Zechariah 12:10 when describing the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus and what the response of those “who pierced him” will be when they see Him. As John is writing to the seven churches of Asia Minor, who are in the midst of a persecuting culture, he comforts them with a reminder of the soon return of the Lord Jesus, citing the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, to support his message. This reference of Zechariah 12:10 by John to the church serves as both a demonstration of John’s apt level of biblical knowledge and understanding and an equipping of the seven churches with the Scriptures so that they can continue in the comfort and security of the Lord Jesus, who will return soon to make all things new.

Summary of Theological Foundations

As seen in Joshua 1:8, the people of God are to think, speak, and act upon the word of God as a lifestyle. This divine directive regarding the believer’s approach to the word of God lends itself to biblical literacy, which involves a basic knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

As outlined above, the Bible is replete (in both the Old and New Testaments) with various examples of ones who were biblically literate, in that they possessed a basic (and even advanced) knowledge of the Scriptures (the Bible), as well as having an understanding of how those same Scriptures connect with and interpreted other Scriptures to explain the divine plan of

¹²⁵ Jim Samra. *James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 235.

God on both a macro and micro level. These examples from Scripture strengthen the argument of the importance of individuals today possessing a healthy level of biblical literacy.

Theoretical Foundations

There is an apparent problem with biblical illiteracy in America today. With over 60 percent of American adults having a desire to increase their personal Bible reading but not fulfilling that desire¹²⁶, there is the need for a practical remedy to this major problem. How can more American adults, and specifically Christians, be convinced of the vital importance in developing a habit of personal Bible reading, and thus resolve, or at the minimum, greatly reduce the existence of biblical illiteracy?

In an effort to address the problem of biblical illiteracy, there have been different methodologies (i.e., Inductive Bible Study, Daily devotional, One Year Bible reading plans) used to serve as a remedy to this current problem. One such method that has been and continues to be used is the electronic Bible or eBible. This method is rising in popularity among the various methodologies used to help remedy biblical illiteracy, possibly due to its sheer convenience. The electronic Bible is the Bible in an electronic form versus the traditional print form; thus, it provides the user with a rather convenient way to engage the Bible. With the electronic Bible, the user is able to access the Bible not only on a computer (i.e., desktop or laptop) but they are also able to access it on their mobile devices, such as a cellular phone or tablet. This makes the Bible very accessible to everyone, especially to those who may not have developed the discipline to open and read/study a print form of the Bible on a regular basis.

¹²⁶ Barna Goup, "Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year's Resolution," (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM.gmail>.

To highlight the usage of the electronic Bible as an option in engaging the Bible, the website, BibleGateway.com, will be used as an example to observe how this methodology is utilized against the traditional print form in the quest for remedying biblical illiteracy.

Electronic Bible Methodology

The electronic Bible allows the user to conveniently read the Bible anywhere, anytime at the press of a button, and BibleGateway is one conduit utilized for such interaction with the Bible. BibleGateway “offers a web-centered search engine with additional elements of devotional reading and Bible tools.”¹²⁷ This web-based feature that BibleGateway provides allows a user the ability to access the Bible and read it from many different versions and languages. In addition to the legible feature, the website also allows the user to access the Bible in an audio format, which serves to remove barriers for those with certain disabilities, like dyslexia, or other hindrances, like illiteracy to provide a means for them to engage the Bible, to gain knowledge and understanding.

Print Bible Methodology

According to the Barna Group, nearly nine in 10 Bible users prefer the traditional print version of the Bible over the available electronic feature.¹²⁸ This could be due to what has also been shown in the same study, that the group that uses the Bible more regularly than any other generation is the Baby Boomer generation.¹²⁹ This group generally consists of those born between 1946 to 1964, which precedes the birth of the current electronic age, so it is

¹²⁷ Peter Phillips, “The Pixelated Text: Reading the Bible within Digital Culture.” *Theology*, 121, no. 6 (November 2018): 403–12. doi:10.1177/0040571X18794139.

¹²⁸ Barna Goup, “*State of the Bible 2018: Seven Top Findings*” (2018), <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-bible-2018-seven-top-findings/>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

understandable why they would naturally be more accustomed to the usage of the print form of the Bible over the electronic form.¹³⁰

Inductive Bible Study Methodology

Another methodology used to assist in remedying biblical illiteracy is inductive Bible study. This methodology is not so much interested in which format (either electronic or print forms) is used, as much it is interested in how the user approaches the text of Scripture. The inductive Bible study method calls for the user to, first of all, accept the text of Scripture as it is in its final form, and then branch out to exploring the different sources that may lie behind the text.¹³¹ In this method, the user gains more of an understanding of the Bible as they learn how to apply hermeneutics properly.

Preferred Methodology

After reviewing some of the different methodologies that can help to resolve biblical illiteracy, this researcher prefers to adopt the print Bible methodology, in contrast to the electronic Bible methodology. Both Peter Phillips and Kevin Barnes' researches on the methodological approach to studying and reading the Bible has found that the print Bible methodology to be more beneficial in promoting biblical literacy than the electronic approach.

Peter Phillips acknowledges the argument regarding the apparent loss of efficacy in utilizing the digital version of the Bible over the print version. He mentions how utilization of the electronic Bible "gives less context for our reading, and readers cannot flip through the whole book and cross-reference different passages or make use of the kind of tactile and photographic

¹³⁰ Wikipedia contributors, "Baby boomers," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, accessed October 13, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Baby_boomers&oldid=982977940.

¹³¹ Robert A. Traina and Bauer, David R.. *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 15.

reading strategies that book readers do subconsciously.”¹³² This results in the readers being in an unfortunate position of not being acquainted with the Bible as much as they would be if there were more use of the print version. This is why Phillips goes on to say, “The argument seems to be that printed or chirographic literature leads to a deeper comprehension of the text, while digital Bible reading can often lead to a superficial skimming across the surface of the text

Kevin Barnes, like Phillips, believes that substitution of the print Bible for the electronic Bible has the potential to keep one from gaining an understanding of the holistic context of Scripture, and consequently contributes to an ongoing cycle of biblical illiteracy. Thus Barnes says, “A person’s likelihood of being impacted by the message of the Bible is reduced when that person does not receive the message in its entirety.”¹³³ Barnes continues by saying, “Piecemealing scriptural data only increases biblical illiteracy rates because the reader likely misses the context of the passage and the context of the biblical story.”¹³⁴ Therefore, when it comes to reading the Bible and addressing biblical illiteracy, this researcher prefers the print Bible methodology for the reasons stated above. However, at the same time, because of the importance of resolving biblical illiteracy among people, specifically among the members of the subject ministry cited in this thesis project, this researcher would encourage the user to access the electronic Bible, if indeed that method would help him/her in their journey of developing a habit of reading the Bible outside of regular church services. This researcher can attest that one of his

¹³² Peter Phillips, “The Pixelated Text: Reading the Bible within Digital Culture.” *Theology*, 121, no. 6 (November 2018): 403–12. doi:10.1177/0040571X18794139.

¹³³ Kevin Bryan Barnes, “A Bible Study about Studying Bible: An Introduction to Inductive Bible Study,” Order No. 10830451, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2065075111%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

teenage sons was using the electronic Bible in his quest to learn more about the Bible; however, the same teenage son eventually asked this researcher for a Bible in print form to deepen his study of the Scriptures.

Summary of Theoretical Foundations

Given the apparent problem of biblical illiteracy among American adults, specifically, Christian adults, there are practical ways to approach the issue and help people overcome biblical illiteracy. There are practical ways of addressing the problem of biblical illiteracy through the implementation of different methodologies. These methodologies include the electronic method, the inductive Bible study method, and the print Bible method. The electronic method in Bible reading is specifically highlighted in the use of BibleGateway, a website that exists to provide the Bible in an electronic form to everyone in various versions and languages. This method also provides a venue for those who have a desire to read the Bible, but also for those who have a disability or other learning hindrances to continue in the minimization and resolution of biblical illiteracy among those in the local church. The other methodology, inductive Bible study, is a method that attempts to make studying the Bible more palatable for everyone. This method allows the reader to absorb the Bible in its specific final canonical form and thus gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible before spreading out to the general, presupposed, non-extant notions behind the text. The final methodology, print Bible form, is the most popular methodology of the methods when it comes to reading and understanding the Bible. This method is rooted in the tradition of those accustomed to engaging the Bible in its physical form versus electronic. Even when it comes to inductive Bible study, it is preferred to be exercised utilizing this long-standing method.

Although there are respect and value in all of the methodologies mentioned earlier to answering the problem of biblical illiteracy, for the reader of the Bible to gain an understanding of the fuller context of Scripture, the utilization of the print Bible methodology is for this researcher, the most effective remedy.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, this researcher describes how he addressed the problem presented within this thesis project. This researcher accomplished this in two ways: Intervention Design and Implementation of the Intervention Design.

The Intervention Design addresses the problem presented in Chapter 1, as well as reflecting upon the sources utilized in Chapter 2 while leading to a description of the specific approach that was used to collect data from the participants involved in the project. The specific approach that was used to collect data yielded a detailed description of this process. Some of the steps that the process include are: who the participants will be, where the collection of data will take place, and the resources that were used.

The Implementation of the Intervention Design demonstrates how the design was carried out step-by-step. In this section, the researcher outlines a narrative rendition of how he anticipated the implementation to be carried out. This includes an anticipated approach to the selected members within the church to participate in the research, as well as their response to the invitation. This chapter concludes with this researcher analyzing and comparing the data collected from the Intervention Design and Implementation of the Intervention Design to record the results in Chapter 4.

Intervention Design

As previously stated, the ministry context within this thesis project involves the congregation at Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, a ten-year-old, multi-cultural,

non-denominational church in Monrovia, California, comprising of African and Hispanic Americans, with most being African-American. The congregation is diverse in age, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens, with a fair amount being in their twenties, thirties, and forties.

Although the congregation holds to the orthodox view of the authority of Scripture, along with its inspiration and position of being the rule of faith and practice of the Church, the problem still remains that there is a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, due to a lack of regular weekly personal Bible reading outside of the Sunday and mid-week services. So, as the purpose of this DMin action research project is to transition the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship from only reading the Bible during Sunday and mid-week services to reading personally and regularly on a weekly basis outside of the scheduled services, this is in hopes that in doing such, the members will not only improve their level of biblical literacy, but they will also enhance their capacity to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). This means that they will be able to better discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error in biblical teaching. They will also be able to demonstrate a lifestyle that is in congruence with “the faith ... entrusted to the saints.”

In connection with the purpose of this research project, it bears to reflect upon Howard and William Hendrick's reason for reading and studying the Bible on a personal level, which is to first and foremost gain spiritual growth.¹³⁵ There are various hindrances to reading the Bible,

¹³⁵ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 23.

such as a wrong view of God, along with human depravity and individual faults.^{136 137} However, there are ways to approach these hindrances wherein Christians, and specifically, the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, can engage in a weekly personal reading of the Bible regularly. One of the ways to approach this reading deficit among the members of the congregation is to present a practical intervention that will challenge the members of the congregation while at the same time enhancing their current level of biblical knowledge.

The intervention will involve the voluntary participation of select members within the congregation, who will be asked to read at least one chapter per week over the course of four consecutive weeks from a self-selected book of the Bible. It will be unknown to this researcher which book of the Bible each participant will select to read, as it is not the focus of this project to highlight or identify which book of the Bible each participant selected, nor is it anticipated that doing such would have any influence on the results of the project. The focus of this project is to address biblical illiteracy within the congregation by developing a habit of reading the Bible outside of regular church services. Therefore, it is the view of this researcher that if the participants begin anywhere in the Bible, wherein at least four chapters can be read over four consecutive weeks, then that will be a good start to developing a habit of regularly reading the Bible and addressing the problem of biblical illiteracy. No other guidelines within the reading intervention were given to the participants.

At the end of the participant's four consecutive weeks of reading at least one chapter per week from their self-selected book of the Bible, they will be asked to complete a questionnaire in

¹³⁶ Aaron Baart, "Why Christians Don't Read the Bible," Digital Collections @ Dordt (2015) https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/338.

¹³⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 1138.

response to the reading assignment. Prior to the reading assignment, the participants will also be given a questionnaire; this questionnaire will serve as a “before” picture against the “after” picture to the final questionnaire. This now segues into the particular method to be used in this project in gathering the initial data from the participants within this research project.

The purpose and objective of the project intervention are to assist the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship to transition from only reading the Bible during Sunday and mid-week services to developing a habit of reading it weekly on a personal level. In the congregation developing this habit of personal Bible reading, it is expected that their level of biblical literacy will improve to the effect that not only will their understanding of the Bible increase, but their exemplifying of the life within the Bible will increase. In addition to this, it is expected that they will also gain a greater capacity to “contend for the faith” in that they will have a greater discernment when it comes to sound biblical teaching and will therefore be in a better position to defend it when the moment comes.

Task for Project

The task at hand in this project is to lead the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship into realizing the need to have a habit of personally reading the Bible on a weekly basis, outside of regular church services.

The task involved selecting at least ten adult members within the congregation to participate;¹³⁸ although, twelve were asked to participate. Prior to the statewide shelter-in-place, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, most of the participants were approached by this researcher in-person to be a part of the project; however, for those who may not have been in

¹³⁸ The number of members being selected is in proportion to the size of this congregation.

attendance around the time this researcher was completing his recruitment of participants, communication by way of a text was sent to the member(s) for their preliminary consent to participate in the project.

The criteria used in selecting the participants for the project were as outlined under Delimitations in chapter 1, which meant that the participants had to be at least 18 years of age and a member of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship. Therefore, the selected members were a mixture of men and women whose ages ranged from eighteen to the late sixties. The relationship of this researcher to the selected members/participants is that he is the pastor of the congregation. This researcher did not bring any known biases to the project.

Time, Location, and Duration for Project

The location where the research was to initially take place was in the church building where this congregation gathers. However, due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the governor of California enacted a State-wide shelter-in-place Order on March 19, 2020, that unfortunately, affected the in-person gathering at the local churches, which were required to close their doors. This resulted in the research taking place mostly by way of email, with only three in-person participation. The three in-person participants resided with this researcher, so it was feasible for those particular participants to receive the hardcopy of what was emailed to the participants. The research began at the end of March 2020 and was to last about six weeks.

Specific Methodology for Project: 10 Questions

The specific methodology that was utilized to gather data from the participants was a questionnaire consisting of the following ten questions:

1. How often do you read the Bible?
2. How would you rate your current Bible knowledge? Poor, Fair, Good, or Great?

3. Why did you rate your current Bible knowledge as you did?
4. What hinders you from reading the Bible outside of Sunday and mid-week church services?
5. How important is it to have knowledge of the Bible?
6. Why do you feel it is or is not important to have a knowledge of the Bible?
7. How satisfied are you with your current level of Bible knowledge?
8. What can you do differently to improve your level of Bible knowledge?
9. How often do you believe you should read the Bible? Please explain.
10. How does your current level of Bible knowledge make you feel in your ability to confidently talk to someone else about it?

After the distribution and collection of the initial questionnaire, the following seven questions served as follow-up questions to the initial ten, as a means to measure the effectiveness of the intervention:

1. How often now do you read the Bible after reading it over these past four weeks?
2. How would you now rate your current Bible knowledge after participating in this 4-week Bible reading experiment? Poor, Fair, Good, or Great?
3. How satisfied are you now with your current rate of weekly Bible reading after reading it over these past four weeks?
4. After reading the Bible these last four weeks, how has your level of confidence changed in regards to talking to others about it?
5. How has reading the Bible over these past four weeks affected your spiritual growth?
6. How did you handle any hindrances to reading the Bible over these past four weeks?
7. What did you do differently over these past four weeks to improve how many times you read the Bible on a weekly basis?

Other than distributing the initial and follow-up questionnaires by way of email to the participants, there was not a need for any other handouts, projectors, posters, videos, or guest speakers for this research project. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the State-wide shutdown

that accompanied it, most of the participants were not able to be physically present during the time in which the questionnaires were physically administered; therefore, most of the participants received and returned their questionnaires by way of an email. As previously noted above, the few who were able, physically received, and returned their questionnaires.

As indicated above, the questionnaires (from initial to final) were to be completed within six weeks. Most of the participants completed both the initial and final questionnaires within the six week period; however, some did not complete the questionnaires within the given period, stretching their total participation up to eight weeks.

The completed questionnaires received by way of email by this researcher were initially stored on his password-protected computer and later printed out by a disinterested party, folded, and given to this researcher, who in turn placed them under lock and key in a small lockbox. For the few questionnaires that were physically received and returned, they were folded by the participant before being given to this researcher, who then placed those completed questionnaires in the same lockbox wherein the other questionnaires were kept.

There was not the usage of any recording devices in the collection of data from the participants.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

From the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2020, this researcher approached members of his congregation about their potential participation in the thesis project. Most expressed a willingness to participate, while some did not. This researcher did not pressure any of the members about any potential participation but respected their openness or lack thereof to participate.

On January 10, 2020, this researcher registered for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and completed the same on January 12, 2020. After completing the CITI training, this researcher began the process of submitting his thesis application, along with the appropriate forms, to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to secure the approval to proceed in the field research portion of the project. This researcher received approval from IRB on March 24, 2020, to proceed with the field research of the project; however, by that time, the governor of the State of California had already issued a shelter-in-place order for the entire State, due to COVID-19. This state-wide shelter-in-place mandate, unfortunately, prevented this researcher from physically distributing both the Recruitment and Consent forms, as well as the initial and final questionnaires, on a Sunday to the members of the congregation who had agreed to participate in the project. There was, however, a slight exception with three of the members/participants in their ability to receive the aforesaid forms and questionnaires physically from this researcher because they are related to him and reside with him. A description of the Recruitment and Consent forms that were distributed to the voluntary participants within the church are as follows:

Recruitment Form

The Recruitment form opened with an introduction of this researcher, followed by a purpose statement of the research project, with an invitation to the recipient to participate in the project. The form proceeded with identifying the delimitations of the project, namely that the participants need to be at least 18 years of age and a member of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship. The Recruitment form then informs the potential participant of what he or she will be asked to do, which are:

1. Answer the ten questions listed on the questionnaire, and within one week of your receipt of the questionnaire, place the completed questionnaire in the private,

- designated receptacle located on the table in the church foyer. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire, as the responses need to be anonymous (20 – 30 minutes).
2. Select a book in the Bible, and read one chapter per week for four weeks from the book you selected.
 3. Answer the seven follow-up questions listed on the final questionnaire, and within one week of your receipt of the questionnaire, place the completed questionnaire in the private, designated receptacle located on the table in the church foyer. Again, please do not write your name on the questionnaire, as the responses need to be anonymous (15 – 20 minutes).

The form also assured the potential participant that their involvement would be completely anonymous. It also informed the potential participant of the initial questionnaire, with a request to complete and return it in a designated receptacle that would be in the church foyer; however, due to COVID-19 and subsequent suspension of in-person church gatherings, this act of physically placing the form in the receptacle was substituted with electronic, via email, submission. The potential participant was also informed of the Consent form that would follow the Recruitment form. The Consent form was handled in the same way as the Recruitment form.

Consent Form

The Consent form opened by identifying the title of the project and the Principal Investigator, which is this researcher. Like the Recruitment form, the Consent form opens with an invitation to the potential participant to be a part of the project. The form then proceeds with answering ten questions that are commonly asked in such action research projects. The questions are not on the form given to the potential participants, as they are only for the researcher to see and answer accordingly for the participants to review and decide whether they will participate or not. The ten questions outlined in the Consent form for only this researcher to see and answer accordingly are as follows:

1. What is the study about, and why is it being done?
2. What will happen if you take part in the study?
3. How could you or others benefit from this study?
4. What risks might you experience from being in this study?
5. How will personal information be protected?
6. Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?
7. Is study participation voluntary?
8. What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
9. Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
10. Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

The Consent form then concludes with requesting the potential participant for his or her consent, with the directive to be sure that they understand what the study is about. The potential participant is advised that a copy of this form will be given to them; and for them to contact the researcher/professor if they have any questions.

Once this researcher received approval from IRB to commence the field research, the Recruitment and Consent forms, along with the initial questionnaire, were first physically handed to the aforementioned three members/participants, who were related to and resided with this researcher. Afterward, the same forms were emailed to the other nine members, who agreed to participate.

In cooperation with the project, the participants were to answer the initial questionnaire, consisting of ten questions (listed above), after which they were to place the completed questionnaire anonymously, within a designated receptacle at the church. Afterward, the

participants were to select a book of the Bible and read at least one chapter per week over the course of four weeks. Once the four weeks were complete, the participants were to answer the final/follow-up questionnaire, consisting of seven questions (listed above), and place the final questionnaire within the same designated receptacle that they placed the initial questionnaire. There were no other guidelines given to the participants entailing how they were to read over the course of the four weeks or take notes. The idea behind having an initial questionnaire and a final/follow-up questionnaire was to determine the biblical literacy level of the participants before and after the four weeks of Bible readings.

At the end of four weeks from when the Recruitment and Consent forms, along with the initial questionnaire were distributed, this researcher began to reach out to the participants for their confirmation of readiness to receive the final/follow-up questionnaire. All twelve of the participants indicated their readiness to receive the final questionnaire, so this researcher emailed the questionnaire to ten of the participants and handed the questionnaire to two of them, because at this point, one of the previously referenced three relatives residing with this researcher had relocated to another state.

The participants returning the completed final questionnaire varied to some extent. To begin with, it bears stating how this researcher collected both the completed initial and final questionnaires from the participants. In order to keep the participants anonymous, they were asked not to write or type their names on the questionnaires, and a third party was appointed to print the returning questionnaires of the participants who returned them by email. After the questionnaires were printed, the third party was asked to fold and hand them to this researcher. As for the few that were completed by participants who resided with this researcher, they were also asked not to write their names on the questionnaires, and upon completion, to fold and

return them to this researcher. Once the initial and final questionnaires were received in their hardcopy form, they were kept at the residence of this researcher in a lockbox under lock and key.

The process by which the participants returned their completed initial and final questionnaires was quite different, in that there was not as much of a challenge in collecting the initial questionnaire as there was in collecting the final questionnaire. As was previously stated, twelve participants were recruited for this project, and thus, twelve initial and final questionnaires were distributed. All twelve initial questionnaires were completed and returned by the participants, without significant follow-up; however, only eleven final questionnaires were completed and returned, and some with significant follow-up. It can be concluded that as time within the project went on, some of the participants became rather busy to the point that they either forgot and kept delaying their completion of the final questionnaire, which warranted this researcher to reach out multiple times to remind them to return their final questionnaire.

Once the data have been collected, it will be analyzed utilizing one or more of the following tools:

1. Coding or Themes.
2. "Slippage."
3. "Silence."

Chapter 4

Results

Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” In this passage, the Psalmist is expressing his desire for the word of God. However, he is not only expressing his desire for the word of God, but he is expressing the result of his engaging the word of God, which is that he finds God’s word to be more satisfying and joy-giving than anything on earth. He finds that nothing compares to the goodness of God’s word; as he (the Psalmist) says in Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.” This passage in Psalm 119:103 shows the reader that it is one thing to have a desire to engage the word of God, that is, to read the word of God, but it is another thing to implement it and allow the power of the word to transform a life.

In this chapter, as the initial and subsequent questionnaires have been collected, as outlined within Chapter 3, the results of the data collected will be reported, and where appropriate, graphs and charts will be used to show any contrasts, comparisons, and similarities that result from the research.

Also, during this phase of the project, this researcher will need to establish whether or not the intervention conducted in Chapter 3 produced the anticipated results. If the anticipated results were not produced, or there were unexpected results instead, then this “divergence”¹³⁹ will need to be addressed within this chapter.

¹³⁹ Liberty University School of Divinity Doctor of Ministry Program and Thesis Project Handbook 2018, 44.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, a study conducted by Barna over a five-year span (2011 - 2016), in conjunction with the American Bible Society, shows that 61 percent of adults (2016) within the United States have a desire to read the Bible more than they currently do. This is because “even with skepticism on the rise, Americans still hold the Bible in high regard,” and “... agree that the Bible contains everything you need to know to live a meaningful life ... ;” and for the practicing Christian, this is all the more true, due to the position on the inspiration of Scripture and it being the rule of faith and practice of the Church. The same can be said of the local congregation addressed in this thesis when it comes to its view and disposition toward Scripture. However, the problem is that there is a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship due to a lack of regular personal Bible reading outside of the weekly Sunday and mid-week services.

To address the problem of a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, this researcher presented a series of questions to twelve voluntary members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship. As was previously outlined in this thesis project, the series of questions presented consisted of an initial questionnaire comprised of ten questions and a subsequent final questionnaire comprised of seven questions. The initial questionnaire gives a picture of the participant's biblical literacy level and Bible reading frequency before the 4-week Bible reading assignment, while the final questionnaire gives a picture of the participant's biblical literacy level and Bible reading frequency after the four week Bible reading assignment.

After this researcher distributed both the initial and final questionnaires to the participants and collected the same from the participants, he analyzed the data using “themes,” one of the “Three Analytical Frames” discussed by Sensing.¹⁴⁰

It bears stating that of the twelve initial questionnaires that were distributed to the voluntary members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, all twelve were returned to this researcher completed. However, in the distribution and collection of the twelve final questionnaires to and from the participants, only eleven were returned completed. Therefore, the results are based on eleven, instead of twelve.

Initial Questionnaire

The results observed from the initial questionnaire in addressing the problem of biblical literacy, being fueled by a lack of regular Bible reading outside of church services among the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, varied somewhat; however, in some ways, they were similar.

The first question in the initial questionnaire, “How often do you read the Bible?” yielded several responses that could be placed in three different main categories/themes, along with three different sub-categories/themes. The three main categories/themes are Daily, Weekly, and Never outside of service. The sub-categories/themes are: Often, Not Enough, and Not at all.

Main Categories/Themes: Daily (Reading), Weekly (Reading), and Never (Reading)

Of the eleven church members who participated in completing and returning the initial questionnaire, 27 percent say they read the Bible daily, while 19 percent say they read the Bible weekly, which would also include those who say they read the Bible at least twice per week.

¹⁴⁰ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 197-199.

However, of those who say they never read the Bible outside of church services, 27 percent fit into this category. This is the same as those who say they read the Bible daily. Given the problem statement of this project, this researcher was not surprised about the percentage of participants who indicate they never read the Bible outside of church services. However, this researcher was somewhat surprised by the percentage of participants who say they read the Bible on a daily basis; and particularly, that the percentage between these two particular groups are the same.

Sub-Categories/Themes: Often (Reading), Not Enough (Reading), and Not At All (Reading)

Within the aforesaid three main themes, there are the findings of three sub-themes: participants who say they read the Bible often, this is a sub-theme of daily reading; others who say they do not read the Bible enough, this is a sub-theme of weekly reading; and others who say they do not read the Bible at all, this is a sub-theme of never reading outside of church services.

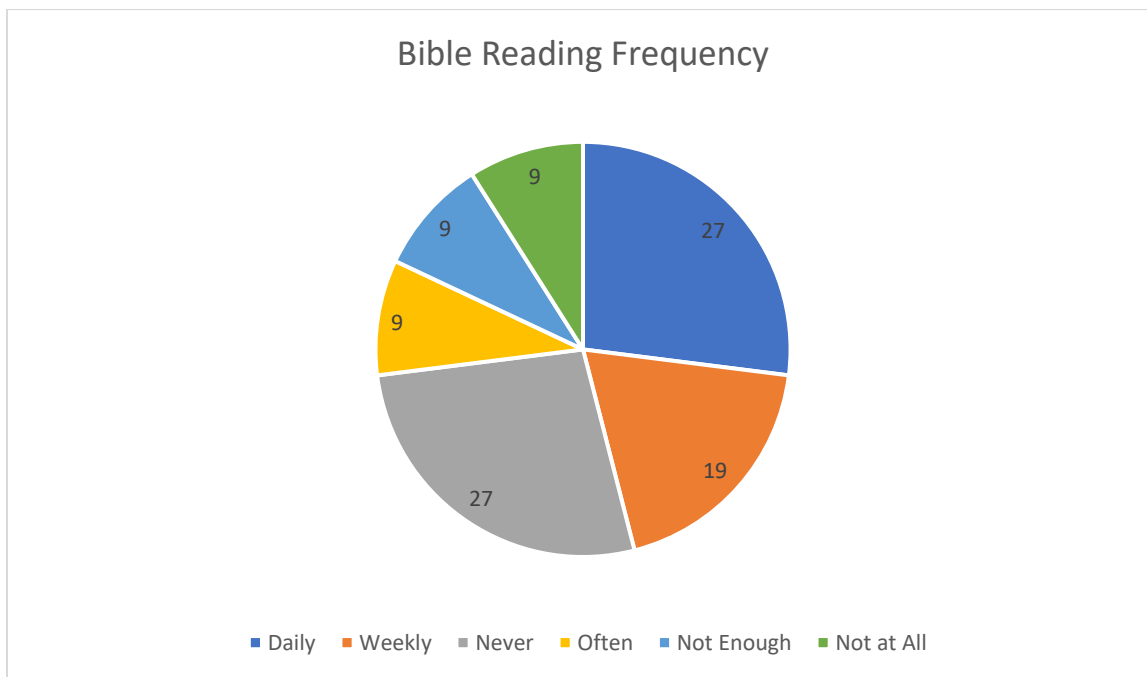


Figure 1. Bible Reading Frequency

Among the eleven participants, 9 percent said they “Read often,” while another 9 percent said they do not read enough, and another 9 percent said they do not read the Bible at all. Now, the 9 percent who reported “not reading at all” is seen by this researcher as being different from those within the main category who reported as never reading, because those who reported as never reading the Bible, stated so with the distinction, “outside of service,” while the “not at all” reader did not make such distinction.

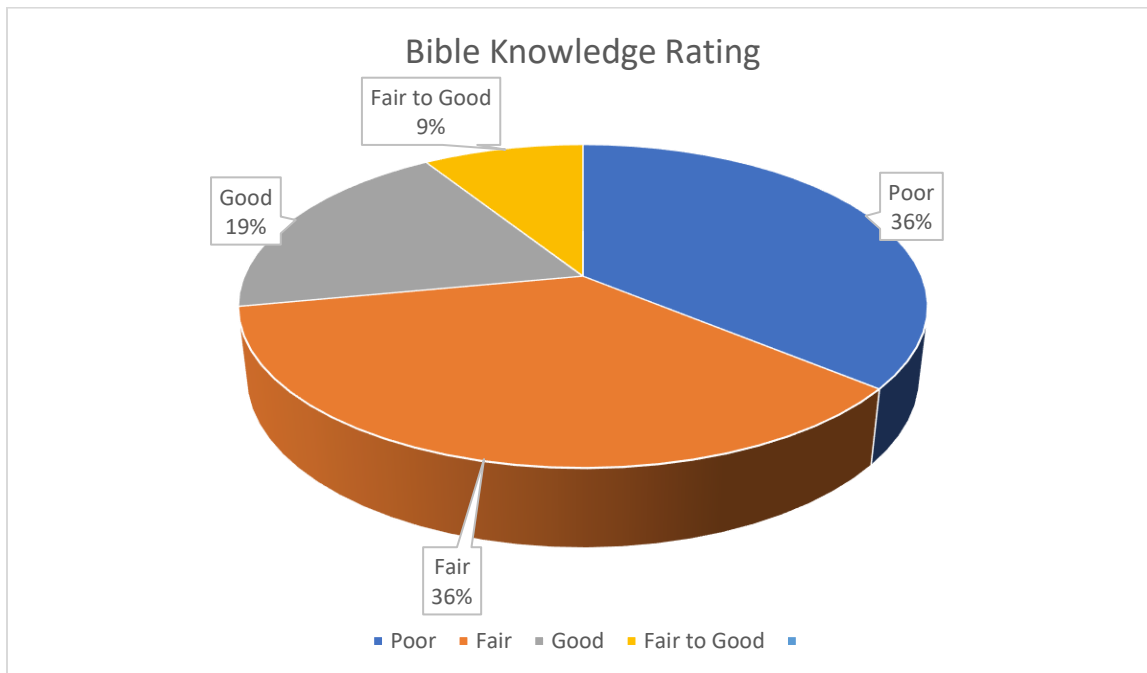


Figure 2. Bible Knowledge Rating

The second question in the questionnaire, “How would you rate your current Bible knowledge? Poor, Fair, Good, or Great?,” yielded the following responses: Of those who rated themselves as having poor bible knowledge, 36 percent, while another 36 percent said their Bible knowledge is fair. Among those who rated themselves as having a good knowledge of the Bible, 19 percent. Lastly, 9 percent placed themselves in between fair to good. There was no one among the participants who claimed to have great Bible knowledge. The results for this question are within the expected outcome, given what is outlined in the problem statement.

The third question in the questionnaire, “Why did you rate your current Bible knowledge as you did?” naturally flows from the second question, and therefore, should be factored together. The results yielded the following: Eighteen percent of the participants rated themselves as having a poor level of Bible knowledge because they do not consistently read the Bible, while another 18 percent indicated that they do not either know or remember the Scriptures as they should. Of those who rated themselves as having a fair level of Bible knowledge, 28 percent rated themselves as such because they are not able to recall the Scripture or reference chapter and verse as desired, while 9 percent said they do not know the “background stories.” The 9 percent who rated their level of Bible knowledge as good did so because they see themselves as having a good knowledge of the Bible. There is 9 percent who rated themselves as having a fair to good knowledge of the Bible because they believe they still have more to learn of the Bible personally. One participant, who would make up the remaining 9 percent, seems to have not understood the question, as their answer was not related to the question.

The fourth question in the questionnaire, “What hinders you from reading the Bible outside of Sunday and mid-week church services?” yielded various responses under at least 5 different themes: Work, Home, and Taking care of the children; Complacency/Procrastination; Unsure why not reading more; Not a book reader; and Not hindered. Of the participants who pointed to everyday life, as seen in work, home, and children, as the reason for not reading the Bible outside of Sunday and mid-week church services, 28 percent placed themselves in this category. However, 36 percent placed themselves in the complacency/procrastination category as the reason for not reading the Bible outside of regular church services. The least participants identified with the last three (Unsure why not reading more; Not a book reader; and Not hindered), each rating at 9 percent. One participant did not answer the question. These results are

not outside of the expected answers, as they reflect a common sentiment among many people, as is previously cited by Howard Hendricks and Bret Mavrich in Chapter 2 Literature Review.

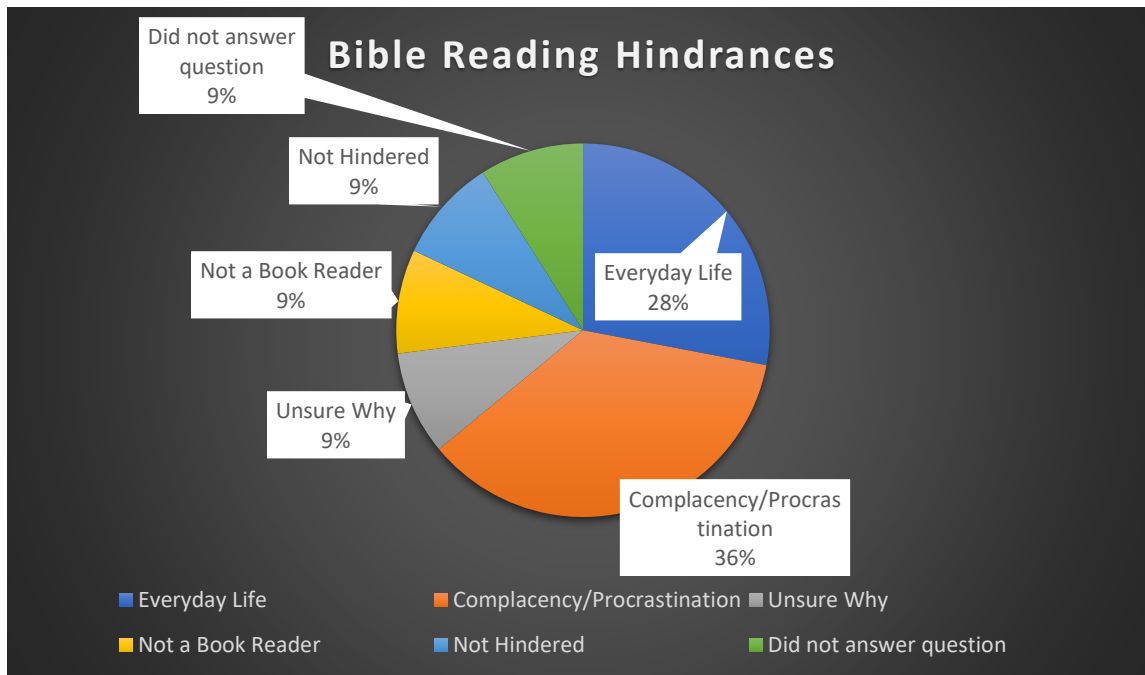


Figure 3. Bible Reading Hindrances

The fifth question in the questionnaire, “How important is it to have knowledge of the Bible?” yielded 82 percent of the participants who answered, “very important,” while 18 percent answered, “important.” This is not a surprising result due to the fact that, according to a 2017 article by the Barna Group, “Americans still hold the Bible in high regard,” and “... agree that the Bible contains everything you need to know to live a meaningful life;”¹⁴¹ and this local congregation would be no different.

The sixth question in the questionnaire, “Why do you feel it is or is not important to have a knowledge of the Bible?” is an opportunity for the participant to elaborate on the previous fifth question regarding their view of the importance of having biblical knowledge. The results

¹⁴¹ Barna Group, “*Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution*,” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM.gmail>.

yielded 37 percent of the 11 participants, who report that having a knowledge of the Bible is “very important,” believe so because they view it as a way to connect with God and follow his commandments. Of the 9 percent who also hold to a “very important” view of possessing biblical knowledge, believe such because they value being able to accurately defend the faith, while another 18 percent, who have a “very important” view of possessing biblical knowledge, hold to such because they see it as being a means to live properly or godly in this world. It can also be said that another 9 percent of the participants, who hold to the “very important” view of knowing the Bible, believe such because they see it as a means of help in difficult times. Quite similarly, another 9 percent of the “very important” perspective sees that having biblical knowledge helps with answering the problems in life. As for the participants who say that having a knowledge of the Bible is “important,” 9 percent say that having an “important” level of biblical knowledge helps for them to be able to talk to someone else about the Bible, while 9 percent say that knowing the Bible is “important” because they see it as a means to defend the faith.

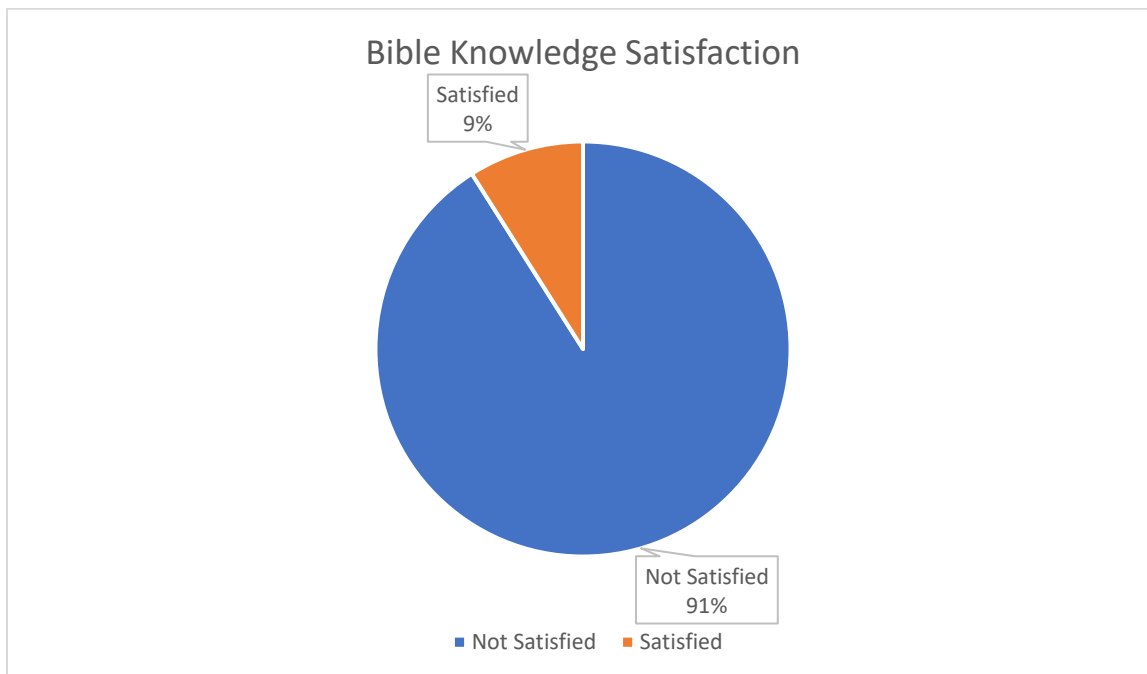


Figure 4. Bible Knowledge Satisfaction

The seventh question in the questionnaire, “How satisfied are you with your current level of Bible knowledge?” resulted in 91 percent saying that they are not satisfied with their current level of Bible knowledge, while 9 percent say they are satisfied.

Given the problem statement of this thesis, the results found in question seven is not surprising to this researcher.

The eighth question in the questionnaire, “What can you do differently to improve your level of Bible knowledge?” resulted in an overwhelming response from all eleven participants that they need to: Read, study, pray, and attend Bible study more. This corresponds to a study conducted by Barna over a five-year span (2011 - 2016), in conjunction with the American Bible Society, that 61 percent of adults (2016) within the United States have a desire to read the Bible more than they currently do.¹⁴²

The ninth question in the questionnaire, “How often do you believe you should read the Bible? Please explain?,” resulted in 55 percent of the participants reporting that they should read the Bible on a daily basis. Of the 55 percent, who reported that the Bible should be read daily, 36 percent reported the reason for daily reading is to help with learning and understanding both the Scriptures and God more. This 55 percent, who reported the Bible should be read on a daily basis, would agree with Todd Leach, who, as previously seen, points out how the Bible serves as the principal means of both knowing and understanding the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁴³ On the other hand, 27 percent of the eleven participants reported that the Bible should be read a few times per week, without specifying exactly how many times “a few times” would entail.

¹⁴² Barna Group, “*Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution*,” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM.gmail>.

¹⁴³ Todd A. Leach, *Encouraging word: the Pastor's role in increasing Biblical literacy in the local congregation* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016).<https://place.asburyseminary.edu/economicsdissertations/812/>, 6-7.

However, 9 percent reported that the Bible should be read at least once per week, while another 9 percent reported that the Bible should be read however much the reader wants to read.

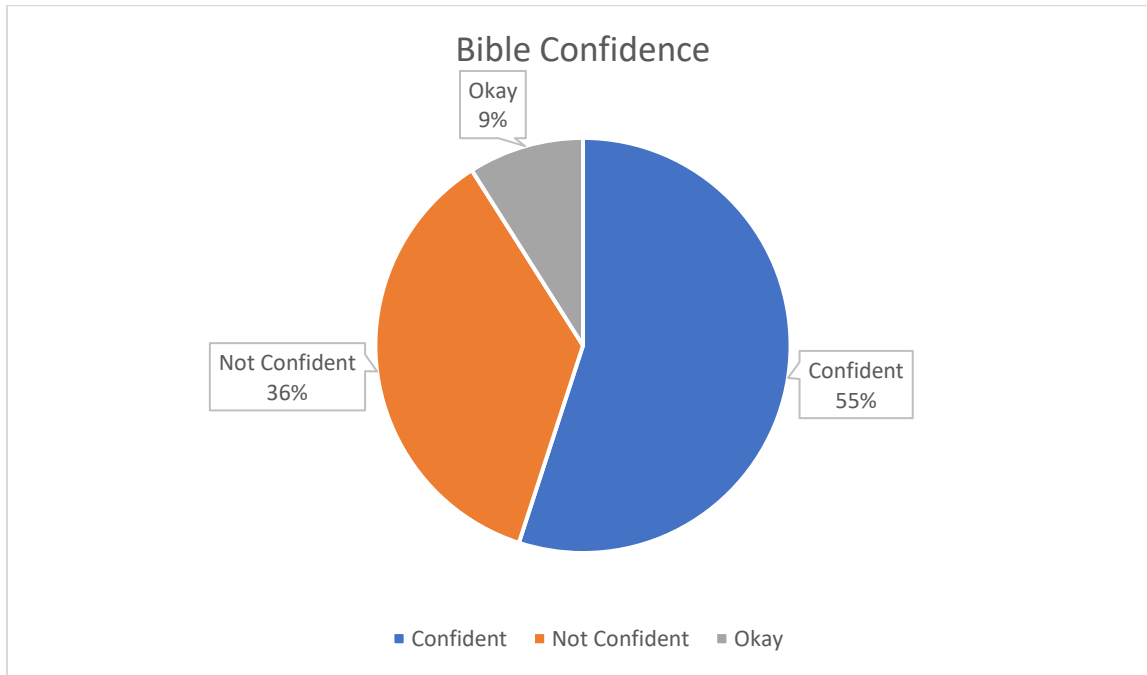


Figure 5. Bible Confidence

The tenth question in the questionnaire, “How does your current level of Bible knowledge make you feel in your ability to talk to someone else about it confidently?” yielded the following results: 55 percent report confidence to talk to someone else about the Bible, while 27 percent of the 50 percent reporting that, while they can talk to someone about the Bible, they do not feel confident to engage in a debate on the Bible. This 55 percent who report confidence in talking to someone else about the Bible seems somewhat surprising since only 26 percent report as reading the Bible daily, and 91 percent report as not being satisfied with their current level of Bible knowledge. Now, unlike the 55 percent who report being confident to talk to someone else about the Bible, 36 percent report that they are not confident to talk to someone else about the Bible. However, 9 percent report as being somewhere in the middle by concluding that they are okay with talking about the Bible to someone else.

Final Questionnaire

The results from the final questionnaire reflect the outcome of the assignment, in which the participants were to read at least one chapter per week, from a self-selected book within the Bible, over a four week period. The results from the final questionnaire will be compared against that of the results recorded within the initial questionnaire. As a reminder, the number of initial questionnaires received by this researcher from the twelve participants was twelve; however, the number of final questionnaires received by this researcher from the same twelve participants was eleven. Therefore, the results from the final questionnaire, just as in the initial questionnaire, are based upon eleven of the participants, instead of twelve.

The first question in the final questionnaire, “How often now do you read the Bible after reading it over these past four weeks?” yields results that could be divided into four different themes: Daily, Weekly, Not at all, and Not enough.

Final Questionnaire Themes

Daily (Reading)

The daily reading theme reveals that 36 percent of the participants report as reading the Bible daily, post the 4-week Bible reading assignment, with 9 percent of the 36 percent reporting that they already were reading daily, but now they read more than what they used to, and another 9 percent reporting that in their daily reading, they have progressed from reading only verses to reading chapters. These results of daily reading, post the 4-week reading assignment, reflect an 9 percent increase from those who reported reading the Bible daily in the initial questionnaire.

Weekly (Reading)

The weekly reading theme reveals that 45 percent of the participants report as reading the Bible weekly, post the 4-week Bible reading assignment. This result is a 26 percent increase from the 19 percent who reported a weekly reading of the Bible in the initial questionnaire.

Not (Reading) At All

The “not reading at all” theme reveals that 9 percent report not reading the Bible at all since the conclusion of the 4-week Bible reading assignment. This coincides with the 9 percent who reported, within the initial questionnaire, as not reading the Bible at all.

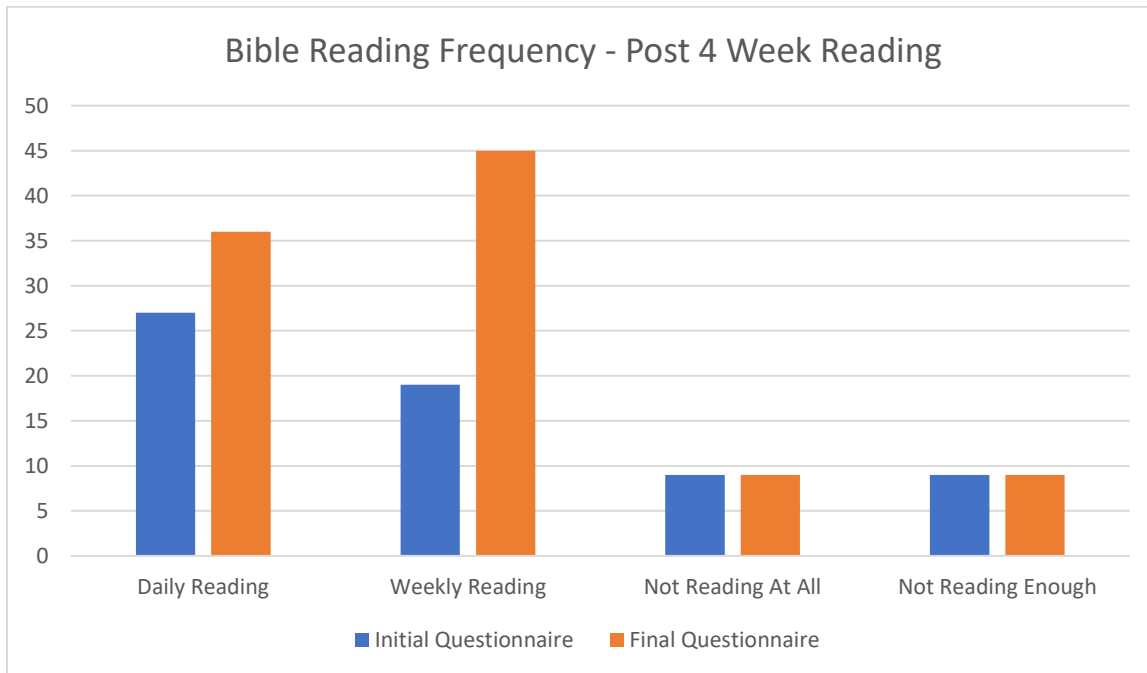


Figure 6. Bible Reading Frequency – Post 4 Week Reading

Not (Reading) Enough

The “not reading enough” theme reveals that 9 percent report as not reading the Bible as much as they should, post the 4-week Bible reading assignment. This is a lateral comparison to the 9 percent that reported not reading the Bible enough in the initial questionnaire.

The second question in the final questionnaire, “How would you now rate your current Bible knowledge after participating in this 4-week Bible reading experiment,? Poor, Fair, Good, or Great?” yielded results that reflect some participants who rated themselves higher than before the 4-week reading. The participants who said their Bible knowledge is “Poor” were among 19 percent, which is a decrease from the 36 percent who rated themselves as having poor Bible knowledge in the initial questionnaire. When it came to having “Fair” Bible knowledge, the rating among the participants was 45 percent. This is a 9 percent increase from the results given in the initial questionnaire. Among the participants who rated themselves as having “Good” Bible knowledge, there was a slight increase from 19 percent to 27 percent post the 4-week Bible reading. Just as in the initial questionnaire, there was an additional option (fair to good) created by the participants, of which the same 9 percent rated themselves as having in both questionnaires. It stands to say that no participants rated themselves as having “Great” Bible knowledge in either questionnaire.

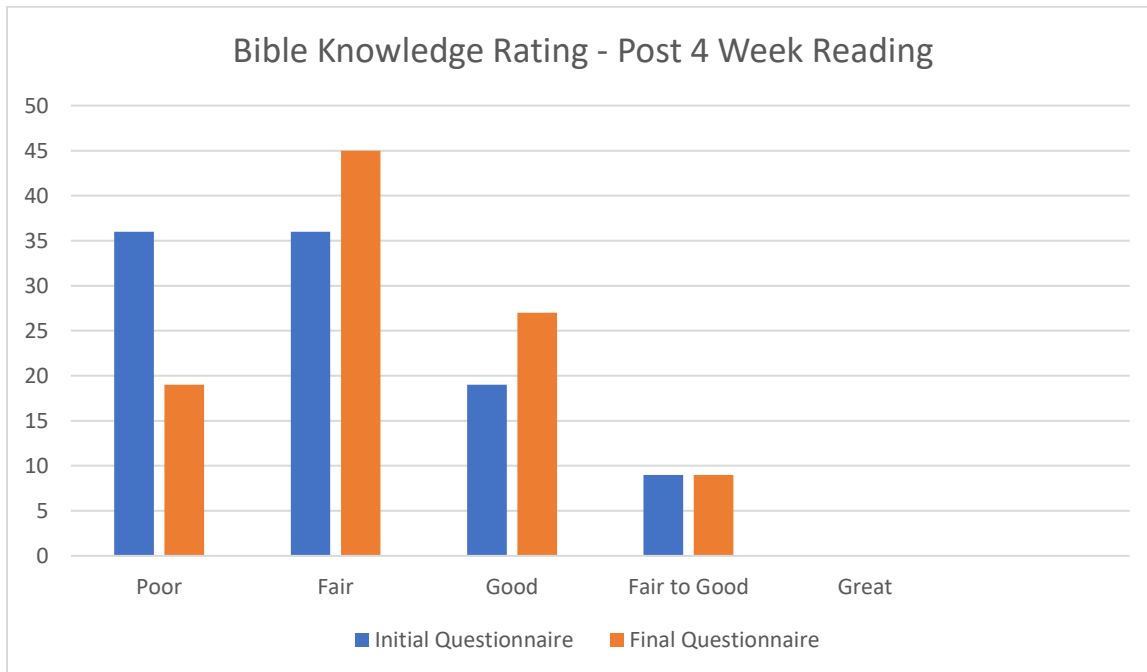


Figure 7. Bible Knowledge Rating – Post 4 Week Reading

For the third question in the final questionnaire, “How satisfied are you now with your current rate of weekly Bible reading after reading it over these past four weeks?” Thirty-six percent say they are satisfied, while 28 percent say they are very satisfied. Nine percent say they are either better, pretty satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or more satisfied with their current rate of weekly Bible reading after reading it over four weeks. It bears highlighting some of the improvements mentioned by some of the participants in responding to this question. One of the participants who answered that he/she is very satisfied with the current rate of weekly Bible reading after the four weeks also said he/she is motivated. Another who also said he/she is very satisfied added that before the experiment, his/her reading was non-existent outside of the church, but now he/she reads at least once per week. Another claimed to be very satisfied because he/she has made it (reading the Bible) a daily habit. Another is more satisfied than the 4-week program because he/she is reading regularly. Another said he/she is glad he/she started reading the Bible on a more regular basis.

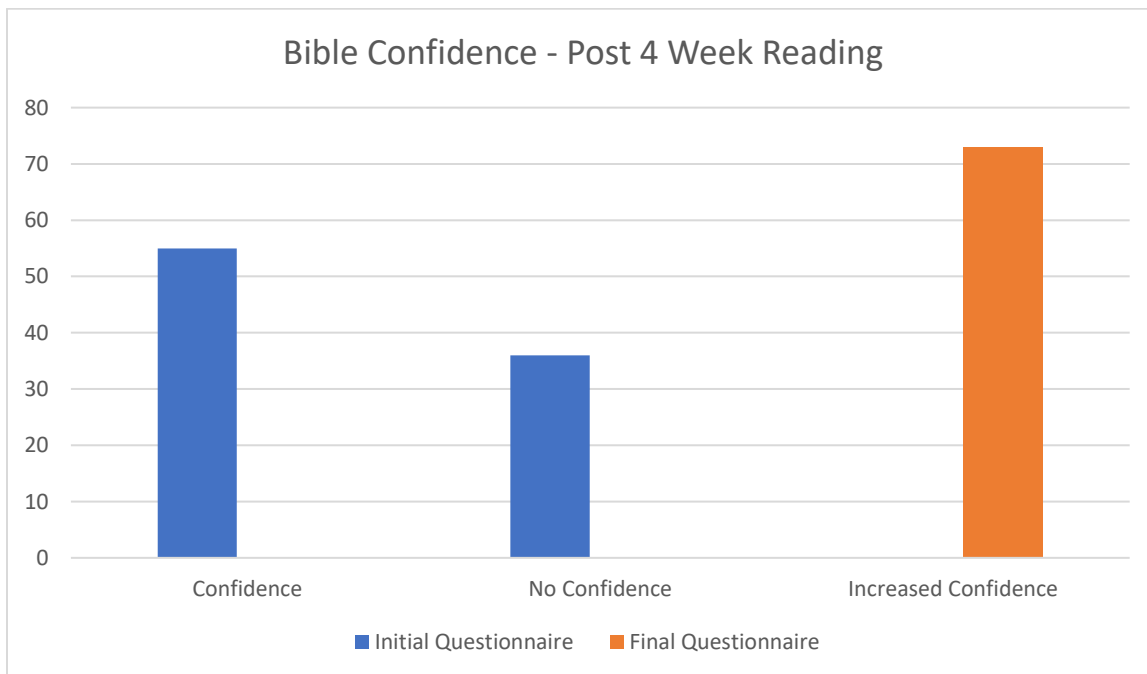


Figure 8. Bible Confidence – Post 4 Week Reading

The fourth question in the final questionnaire, “After reading the Bible these last four weeks, how has your level of confidence changed in regards to talking to others about it?” resulted in the following: Twenty-seven percent report their confidence level remaining unchanged, while 36 percent say it is a little better. Nineteen percent report their confidence level being higher than before, and 18 percent say that it is better than before. These results are an improvement from what was reported in the initial questionnaire in answer to this question before the 4-week Bible reading assignment. Seventy-three percent of the participants report an overall increased level of confidence after reading the Bible over four weeks to the 55 percent who reported as having confidence, and the 36 percent who reported as having no confidence before reading the Bible over the four weeks.

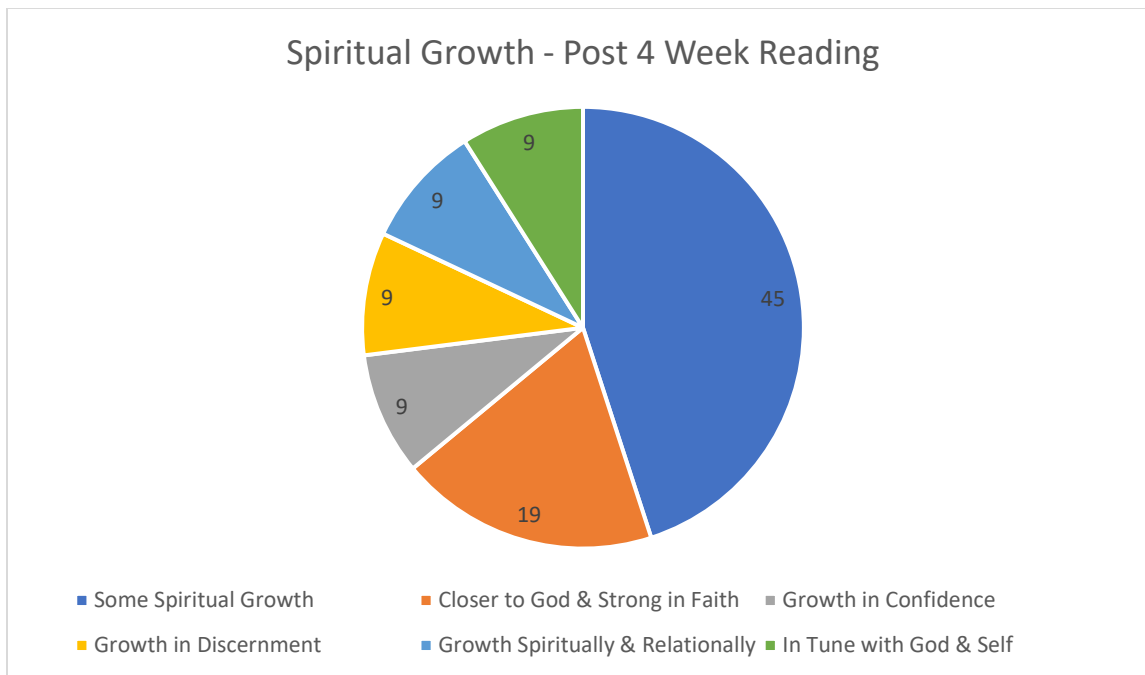


Figure 9. Spiritual Growth – Post 4 Week Reading

The fifth question in the final questionnaire, “How has reading the Bible over these past four weeks affected your spiritual growth?” yielded the following: Forty-five percent reported having some spiritual growth, while 19 percent reported having drawn closer to God and

strengthened in their faith. Nine percent of the participants reported having grown in confidence with the Lord and understanding of the Bible and having more confidence in themselves.

Another 9 percent reported growth in their ability to identify certain trials in their life because of the 4-week Bible reading assignment. Another 9 percent reported growing spiritually, in addition to growing with their spouse and their marriage. Another 9 percent reported growing in a way that they were in tune with God and themselves.

The sixth question in the final questionnaire, “How did you handle any hindrances to reading the Bible over these past four weeks?” yielded various results. Twenty-seven percent of the participants report disciplining themselves to read something from the Bible to stay in the rhythm of the weekly reading. Nineteen percent report handling the hindrances to the weekly reading by researching anything in Scripture wherein they may have become stuck in understanding. Nine percent of other participants report implementing the following: incorporating other spiritual exercises, such as listening to gospel music or past sermons and prayer, to help them get back on track if needed; reading the Scripture over a few times; pray and think on the passages that were read; pray; remember that they were assisting the pastor to complete his thesis project; and if they missed a reading, they would read an additional chapter the following day.

The seventh question in the final questionnaire, “What did you do differently over these past four weeks to improve how many times you read the Bible on a weekly basis?” resulted in each participant, or 9 percent, reporting differently. One participant reported filling downtime with reading the Bible in order to improve the number of times they read the Bible on a weekly basis, while another reported purchasing a journal to record his/her readings. Another participant reported reading both morning and evening to improve the Bible reading frequency, while

another reported setting a certain amount of time aside to read the Bible. Another participant reported listening to different pastors explaining the Scriptures, while another reported not doing anything particularly different but just did what he/she needed to do to improve his/her Bible reading frequency. Another participant reported reading one chapter per day instead of just reading verses, while another reported continuing in his/her daily reading of the Bible, a discipline he/she reported having before the assignment in this thesis project. Another participant reported reading the Bible weekly before they went back to work (presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic), and fortunately, has not slacked on Bible reading after returning back to work. Another participant reported setting a reminder on their phone to assist them in remembering to read the Bible, while another reported making sure they did not go to bed without reading something in the Bible. This various reporting of results from the participants assisted them in improving how many times they read the Bible on a weekly basis over the assigned four weeks.

Anomaly

There is an anomaly, which warrants attention, and that is the absence of the “often” theme. No one reported reading the Bible “often” post 4-week reading assignment, as 9 percent reported in the initial questionnaire. It would seem that with all of the other themes previously mentioned, which were in the initial questionnaire, someone would have indicated that they read the Bible often, post 4-week Bible reading assignment.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The purpose of this DMin action research project is to transition the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship from only reading the Bible during Sunday and mid-week services to reading personally and regularly on a weekly basis outside of the scheduled services. This will produce a level of biblical literacy in the congregation whereby they will be better prepared to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). This means that the members will have a greater discernment when it comes to sound biblical teaching and will therefore be in a better position to defend the faith when the time comes.

To help move the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship from a church service only reading congregation to a weekly, outside of church service reading congregation, an initial and final questionnaire were administered to voluntary members within the church, along with an assignment to select any book of the Bible and read at least one chapter per week from the selected book over four consecutive weeks. It was unknown to this researcher which book of the Bible each participant chose to read from, as it was not the focus of this project to highlight or identify which book of the Bible each participant selected; and as anticipated, such omission in having participants identify their self-selected book from the Bible did not have any influence on the results of the project. No other guidelines within the reading intervention were given to the participants. At the end of the four weeks, the final questionnaire was administered to the participants in order to measure their progress against the questions and answers outlined within the initial questionnaire.

One of the highlighting questions presented in the questionnaire addressed the participant's view of the importance of having a knowledge of the Bible. The question asked, "Why do you feel it is or is not important to have a knowledge of the Bible?" In answer to this question, a few of the participants expressed their view of the importance of knowing the Bible as a direct link to "[being] able to connect with God and follow His commandments." This answer on the part of the participants shows the desire to engage and submit to the process of spiritual formation, to which Klaus Issler speaks in his address on how the Bible is more than just a means whereby someone is able to study a recorded layout of history, but that engagement with it (the Bible) is communication and fellowship with God.¹⁴⁴ The participant's answer also confirms the position of Adele Ahlberg Calhoun in that devotional Bible reading is not limited to an exegetical exercise, but rather it is a show of companionship between the reader and the divine.¹⁴⁵ So, as an individual increase in their Bible knowledge, they develop the potential to increase in their communion with God. Christiane M. Lang Hearlson also gives credence to the link between having a knowledge of the Bible and being able to connect with God by mentioning how biblical literacy provides an avenue for communication with God.¹⁴⁶ All of these published works from the various named authors give confirmation from the academia to the importance of having a knowledge of the Bible in order to be able to connect with God and follow His commandments.

¹⁴⁴ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 140.

¹⁴⁵ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 168.

¹⁴⁶ Christiane M. Lang Hearlson, "Biblical Literacy as the Practice of Social Identity: A Practical Theological Engagement with New Literacy Studies." Order No. 10141775, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1822497968?accountid=12085>.

Another highlighting question presented in the questionnaire addresses hindrances in reading the Bible outside of Sunday and mid-week church services. The majority of the participants pointed to the realities of work, home, and taking care of children as a hindrance to their engagement with the Bible on a more regular basis. In analyzing the published works within the Review of Literature regarding this subject, it is observed that the participant's response to this question regarding their hindrances in reading the Bible confirms the observation made by Olesberg and Fernando, in that they say the Bible is not being read daily because people are either too busy and too distracted both externally and internally.¹⁴⁷ The participant's answer to the hindrance factor of reading the Bible also confirms the observation made by George Guthrie, in that people do not read the Bible because they are spread too thin due to their busy schedules.¹⁴⁸

There is one other question within the final questionnaire that is also worth highlighting; it is the question that addresses how reading the Bible over the four weeks affected the participant's spiritual growth. All of the participants expressed in some way how reading the Bible over four weeks helped in their spiritual growth. A small percentage of the participants went as far as to say that their spiritual growth from reading the Bible was not only personal but also relational when it came to how they interacted with their spouse. They expressed how the Bible reading helped them to grow in their marriage. These results from the participants, as it relates to their spiritual growth from reading the Bible, support what Ryan D. Harker says in his view of how one's engagement with the Scriptures contributes to the enhancement of their spiritual growth. In essence, Harker writes of the spiritual growth that takes place in the life of

¹⁴⁷ Lindsay Olesberg and Ajith Fernando, *The Bible Study Handbook : A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁸ George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 10.

the Christian when he or she is reading the Bible with a pliable heart that can be formed and fashioned to the end that their view of the world is in congruence with the perspective given through the lens of the very pages of the Bible being read. This is all in spite of living in a culture dominated by technology, which vies for the Christian's attention over that of the Bible.¹⁴⁹ For the participants, reading the Bible over four weeks allowed them to form a biblical perspective of the world that affected their personal world and relationships, even in the midst of a culture wherein the anti-biblical influences of the media and like sources are loud and prevalent.

In reviewing the findings of this study in light of its foundational theological framework as presented in Chapter 2, the participant's self-reported knowledge of the Bible initially proved to be mostly "fair to poor" and "dissatisfied." However, at the end of reading the Bible over four consecutive weeks, it moved to mostly fair to good and a better level of satisfaction. This improvement, although small, in the participant's biblical literacy is still significant because by taking the time to read the Bible, they position themselves to know and understand more of what it says. As outlined under the theological foundation, this is what the apostles, such as Paul, Peter, John, as well as the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others did; and in doing so, they not only knew more of what God said, but they also understood how to apply what God said. It is as Katie Edwards says of biblical literacy, in that it is "Knowing the Bible; Being familiar with popular Bible characters; Being able to recognize common biblical phrases, and Being able to connect the knowledge to references in literature."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ryan D. Harker. 2015. "Reading the Bible in a Technopoly." *Vision* (Winnipeg, Man.) 16 (2): 52–59. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI GEV160530001621&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁵⁰ Katie Edwards, *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.

In reviewing the findings of this study in light of its foundational theoretical framework as presented in Chapter 2, it is unclear what methodology the participants implemented in reading the Bible during the 4-week assignment. There was no question presented that addressed which methodology they may have used. Given that this researcher is the pastor of the church which the participants attend, he had the opportunity to see what some of the participants used to follow along in their Bible in church service; and with that, he has noticed some to have the print Bible form, and some to have the electronic form on their phone. Therefore, it is safe to presume that some of the participants utilized the electronic method when it came to reading the Bible during the 4-week assignment, while other participants utilized the print Bible method. As to the reason for the participants utilizing one method over the other, this is unknown to this researcher; however, it can be safely concluded that the participants who utilized the electronic method did so either because it was convenient or because they did not have a print Bible. This is based upon the knowledge of this researcher, as it relates to the participants in that none have a learning disability, such as dyslexia, or are illiterate, in which case they would be compelled to use the electronic method, particularly the audio feature within the electronic method. As for the remaining participants, who utilized the print Bible method, it could be assumed that they selected this method because they are more accustomed to this method, possibly through their upbringing or from observing this researcher utilize the print Bible during church services. Again, because the methodology of reading the Bible was not addressed to the participants, it is conclusively unclear which method was used and why.

So, in reviewing the findings of this study in light of both the theological and theoretical foundational frameworks as presented in Chapter 2, the participant's satisfaction with their level of Bible knowledge, pre-4-weeks of Bible reading, went from mostly "fair to poor," to "mostly

fair to good.” This reflects well the example of those seen in the Bible, who possessed a good level of biblical literacy and were able to both know and understand the Bible. As well, the participants engaged the Bible by way of a methodology that best suited their needs. Although the methodology utilized by the participants is unclear, it is clear by the results outlined in chapter 4 that whichever the Bible reading method used by the participants, either electronic or print, proved to be effective.

There are some things that this researcher learned while implementing the project. To begin with, this researcher learned that as of 2017, according to the Barna Group, most American adults have a desire to read the Bible more on a personal level, although ironically, they do not do so.¹⁵¹ However, even with the lack of implementing this noble desire to read the Bible more, it still bears recognizing the fact that the desire is there. This leads to something else this researcher learned in implementing this project, which is that most Americans “... still hold the Bible in high regard,” and “... agree that the Bible contains everything you need to know to live a meaningful life.”¹⁵² It would be interesting to know, however, how most American adults view the Bible in 2020, given the massive unrest in the nation over what seems to be the founding biblical principles that undergird American society.¹⁵³

At the implementation of the project, specifically in the initial questionnaire, before the commencing of the 4-week Bible reading assignment, this researcher was able to learn that an equal percentage of the participants either read the Bible on a daily basis (25 percent) or never read it outside of church services (25 percent). This researcher was actually anticipating that

¹⁵¹ Barna Group, “*Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution*,” (2017), <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/#.XbE9q3rf3XM.gmail>.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

there would be fewer participants who indicated that they read the Bible daily than those that did not. This is due to what this researcher stated above in Chapter 1 under the Problem Statement, that, “ ... the problem is that there is a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, due to a lack of regular personal Bible reading outside of the weekly Sunday and mid-week services.” This is not to say the Problem Statement is inaccurate because, as seen above in Chapter 4, most of the participants, in the initial questionnaire, rated their Bible knowledge between “fair” and “poor,” while only a small percentage rated their Bible knowledge as “good.” Nonetheless, this researcher was pleasantly surprised to learn the number of participants (members) in the initial questionnaire who read the Bible on a daily basis.

In implementing the project, this researcher was also able to learn, post the 4-week Bible reading assignment in the final questionnaire, that the overall research, with its assignment, was successful. There was an increase in the frequency of Bible reading among the participants after the four weeks of reading the Bible than before it. There was also a slight increase in the participant's rating of their Bible knowledge after the four weeks of reading the Bible. Also, the participant's satisfaction with their rate of weekly Bible reading increased after the four weeks of reading the Bible. In addition, the participant's confidence to talk with others about the Bible improved after they engaged with the Scriptures over four weeks. Most of all, the participants indicated that they had some type of spiritual growth, whether it was growing in confidence with God and themselves, or their ability to identify what is happening in a trial that is in their lives, or drawing closer to God and being strengthened in their faith, or even growing in their marriage. All of these were a result of reading the Bible over a 4-week period, which again proved to be overall successful.

When looking at how the results might apply in other settings, it first bears upon the reader to recall the problem and solution addressed in this thesis project. The problem is centered around the parishioner's lack of a healthy level of biblical knowledge. The solution presented is in the parishioners developing a habit of reading the Bible on a weekly basis outside of Sunday and mid-week services. However, to move the parishioners from biblical illiteracy to biblical literacy, an assignment was implemented, which involved volunteered parishioners exercising the very discipline that the problem statement addresses as the solution, which is reading the Bible on a weekly basis over a certain period; which showed to have a certain level of success. So, to utilize what Michael Patton identifies as "extrapolation," which "... connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings."¹⁵⁴ The results within this project demonstrate the possibility of versatility and application to other settings, particularly that of the ordination of ministers.

A local church or church organization could utilize the results found within this project as part of the criteria of becoming ordained within that local church or church organization. The ordaining church, in accordance with the criteria for a man to be ordained as a bishop (overseer), as outlined in Titus 1:7-9¹⁵⁵, specifically verse 9, wherein it says, "He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it," could use the questions outlined in the initial questionnaire as a gauge for the candidate's relationship with the Bible. Contingent on how the ordaining candidate honestly answers the ten questions (involving Bible

¹⁵⁴ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 216.

¹⁵⁵ I Timothy 3:1-7 is another reference to the criteria of leadership within the church.

reading frequency, self-rating of their level of Bible knowledge, view of importance regarding Bible reading) will determine whether the candidate will move forward to actual ordination.

A biblical class in a Christian school, specifically a college/university, could also utilize the results outlined within this project. As an assignment to assist the students to become more acquainted with the Bible, the professor could put forward the questions, as outlined within both the initial and final questionnaires.

In the process of conducting the study of this project, one thing that emerged that merits future research in conjunction with the subject matter of this thesis is that which is referred to as “*lectio divina*.” According to Wikipedia, *Lectio Divina* (Latin for “Divine Reading”) refers to “a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation, and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word.”¹⁵⁶ Within the initial questionnaire, one of the questions is as follows, “What can you do differently to improve your level of Bible knowledge;” the answers given by the participants ranged from reading, studying, praying, and attending Bible study. These answers reflect a *Lectio Divina*. The matter of incorporating meditation, as Joshua 1:8 says, “This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall *meditate* on it day and night,” as well as the practice of prayer with scriptural reading, to move the participant to a place of deeper fellowship and intimacy with God, and demonstration of His word. This is to be the goal of every believer.

In light of the results of this project, some specific recommendations to stakeholders, specifically the leadership of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship, would be to:

1. Follow up with the participants about their practice of weekly Bible reading. As there was measured improvement between the results in the initial questionnaire and the final questionnaire, specifically in regards to the participant's frequency of Bible reading, it

¹⁵⁶ Wikipedia contributors, “*Lectio Divina*,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, accessed October 17, 2020 https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lectio_Divina&oldid=962760073.

may be helpful for the leadership to follow up with the participants about this to hopefully assist them in maintaining and developing this most necessary practice.

2. Encourage the participants (as well as the entire church) to attend weekly Bible study to help improve their biblical literacy, given this was one of the answers given by the participants when asked, in the initial questionnaire, “What can you do differently to improve your level of Bible knowledge?”
3. Pray for the participants (and the entire church) that they will continue with the progress made in reading the Bible over the four weeks outlined in the project. Also, pray for those participants who indicated no progress made; pray that they will develop the discipline to make reading the Bible a weekly (or even daily) habit.

Summary

In Joshua 1:8, there is a divine exhortation to the people of Israel to continually keep the word of God in their mouth, in their mind, and in their manner of life. In doing so, they would ensure themselves to have a “successful” and “prosperous” life. This directive from God to His people regarding how they should relate to His word naturally calls for His people to have and develop a healthy level of knowledge about His word, knowledge which would come from consistently hearing (and reading) His word.

Throughout this thesis project, the necessity of biblical literacy has been explored by way of addressing a specific problem within the local church of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship. The problem addressed is that there is a lack of basic biblical knowledge within the congregation of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship due to a lack of regular personal Bible reading outside of the weekly Sunday and mid-week services. Therefore, the thesis of this project presented itself as follows: If the members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship develop a habit of weekly personal Bible reading, then not only will they improve their level of biblical literacy, but they will also enhance their capacity to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). This means that they will be able to better

discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error in biblical teaching. They will also be able to demonstrate a lifestyle that is in congruence with “the faith ... entrusted to the saints.”

In addressing the problem, with a view of the thesis, various published works from authors such as D.A. Carson, Darrell L. Bock, and Howard and William Hendricks were reviewed to support and contribute to the thesis of this project. In addition to these published works, a robust theological foundation was established to show the manifold Scriptural support to the thesis, along with a firm theoretical foundation to establish various theories presented by other established works.

An intervention was implemented to solve the problem presented in the thesis project. The intervention involved the selection of twelve voluntary members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship to participate in a 4-week Bible reading assignment, along with completing an initial and final questionnaire concerning the reading assignment; although, only eleven participants completed both questionnaires.

After the intervention, the results were collected and analyzed, utilizing mainly the Coding/Themes approach. The results yielded demonstrated a successful intervention, in which the participants showed an overall improvement from the pre-4-week Bible reading assignment to post-4-week Bible reading assignment.

This researcher hopes that the participants of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship will continue in developing a habit of weekly personal Bible reading, which will not only improve their biblical literacy level but will enhance their capacity to “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” (Jude 3)

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 24, 2020

Christopher Coleman
Samuel Olarewaju

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-110 Biblical Literacy: Developing a Habit of Personal Bible Reading Among the Members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship

Dear Christopher Coleman, Samuel Olarewaju:

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of

continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office